

FEBRUARY

VOL. 24 No. 2

1908

PRICE 25cts

THE SMART SET

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THE SMART SET

A MAGAZINE OF
CLEVERNESS

Vol. XXIV

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No. 2

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YEARLY SUBSCRIPTION \$2.50

SINGLE COPIES 25 CENTS

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Entered at New York Post-Office as second-class mail matter

Issued monthly by Ess Ess Publishing Company, 452 Fifth Avenue, New York

It is requested that all MSS. be addressed to The Editor

WILLIAM D. MANN, Resident

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THE REAPING*

By Mary Imlay Taylor

I

“WILLIAM FOX? He's the most brilliant man they've got, but a two-edged sword; they're all afraid of him!”

The speaker had just left the swinging doors at the foot of the staircase from the Rotunda, under the old Library rooms in the west front of the Capitol, and his companion, who was also a member, was working himself slowly into his greatcoat.

“No wonder; he's got a tongue like a whiplash and his smooth ways only make its sting worse,” he retorted, between his struggles with a recalcitrant sleeve lining and a stiff shoulder.

“That's it, his tongue and his infernal sarcastic humor,” Fox's admirer admitted with reluctance, “but his logic—it's magnificent; his mind cuts as clean as a diamond. He'll be President some day—if he doesn't cut his own throat.”

“Pshaw, man!” retorted the other irritably, “he's brilliant, but as unstable as water, and a damned egoist!”

They had reached the top of the wide steps which descend from the west terrace, and Allestree lost the reply to his outburst in the increasing distance as they went down into the park below. He stood looking after their indistinctly outlined figures as they disappeared slowly into the soft mist which enveloped the scene at his feet. It was about six o'clock, an early December evening, and already night overhead where the sky was heavily clouded. The streets, streaming with water, showed broad circles of shimmering light under the electric

lamps, and the naked trees and the ilexes clustered below the terrace made a darkness through which, and beyond, he saw the long, converging vista of the avenue, lined on either side with what seemed to be wavering and brilliant rainbows, suspended above the wet pavements and apparently melting into one in the extreme distance, as though he looked into the sharp apex of a triangle.

The terrace, except for Allestree, was deserted, and the continuous murmur and roar of city life came up to him slightly softened and subdued, both by the atmospheric depression and the intervening space of the park. Behind him both wings of the Capitol were vividly lighted, for the House had just risen after a heated debate, prolonged, as he amusedly surmised, by the eloquence of William Fox.

At the thought, that much-discussed figure arose before his mind's eye in a new aspect created by the fragment of conversation which had just reached him. He was in the habit of viewing Fox from that intimate standpoint which, discovering all the details, loses the larger effect of the whole; as the man in the wings of the theatre, disillusioned by the tinsel on the costume of an actor and the rouge on his face, loses the grand climax of his dramatic genius and sees instead only the charlatan. Yet Allestree's affection for his cousin was strong enough to embrace even those defects, of which he was keenly aware, and personal enough to feel a thrill of elation at the constant evidences of an increasing recognition of Fox's really great abilities. Yet there was something amusing in the fear

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which he was beginning to inspire in his opponents; amusing, at least, to one who knew him, as Allestree did, to be a man of careless good humor and large indifference.

Knowing all Fox's peculiarities, his not infrequent relaxations, and the complex influences which were at work upon his temperament—the irresponsible temperament of genius—Allestree could not but speculate a little upon that future which was beginning to be of poignant interest to more than one aspirant in the great arena of public life.

But his reflections were cut short at this point by the abrupt appearance of Fox himself. He came out of the same door which had, a few moments earlier, emitted his critics, and, as he emerged upon the terrace, the keen light from the electric globes at the head of the steps fell full on his remarkable face and figure. For, while by no means above the average in stature, Fox possessed one of those personalities which cannot be overlooked.

"Well, Bob," he said genially as he joined his cousin, "you're a lucky dog, out here in the open! The House has steamed like the witches' caldron to-night and brewed devil's broth, tariff revision and all manner of damnable heresies."

Allestree smiled grimly in the dusk. "Then you must be the father of them," he retorted; "I just heard that you'd been making a speech."

"Eh? you did, did you?" Fox paused an instant to light his cigar. "So I did," he admitted, tossing away the match. "I talked tommyrot for an hour and a half to keep the House sitting; I might be going on still if old Killigrew hadn't got to his feet and howled for adjournment. He usually dines at six sharp, and it's a quarter to seven now; he had death and starvation in his eye, and I yielded the point as a matter of humanity."

"According to recent information you have very little humanity in you," Allestree replied, as they descended the long flight of steps from the terrace; "in fact, you are a 'damned egoist.'"

Fox threw back his head with a hearty, careless laugh. "Which of my enemies have you been interviewing?" he asked, with unruffled good humor.

His cousin briefly related the result of his accidental début in the rôle of eavesdropper, incidentally describing the two men.

"I know who they are," Fox said amusedly; "one is Burns of Pennsylvania, and the other a fellow from Rhode Island who is picking flaws in everything and everybody; the Government's rotten, the Senate's corrupt, the Supreme Court is senile—so on and so on *ad infinitum*! Meanwhile there's some kind of a scandal attached to his own election—no one cares what!"

"That is not all; even your admirer feared the suicidal effects of your tongue," continued Allestree teasingly, "which is said to be 'two-edged,' while your sarcasm is 'infernal.'"

"Oh, that's a mere *façon de parler*," laughed Fox. "I'm really as mild as a lamb and as harmless as a dove!"

"Quite so!" retorted his cousin drily, "yet I think most of your enemies and some of your friends resort to the litany when you cut loose for an oratorical flight."

"Well, it's said that even the devil goes to prayers on occasions," said Fox, with a shrug, "so why not my enemies? By the way, the nominations were sent to the Senate just before adjournment tonight, and the Cabinet changes are slated; I heard it as I came out."

"Does Wingfield go out?" Allestree asked, after a momentary pause, as they threaded their way between the electric cars and the carriages which were slightly congested at the crossing below the Peace Monument.

Fox nodded. "And Seymour gets his place, while Wicklow White is made Secretary of the Navy."

His companion looked up quickly and caught only his pale profile outlined against the surrounding fog; his expression was enigmatical. "Upon my word!" exclaimed Allestree, "White's luck is stupendous—you remember what a blockhead we always thought him at Harvard? Well, well,

Margaret will have her heart's desire," he added amusedly.

Fox slightly frowned. "So!" he said contemptuously, "you think the sum total of a woman's desire is to see a chump of a husband with his foot in the stirrup?"

His cousin smiled coldly. "My dear fellow, it was for that Margaret married him," he retorted, "that and his money. When I see her, as I saw her the other night, the most beautiful and charming creature, in the miracle of a costume—she knows how to wear clothes that make pictures—I longed to say to her:

"You, that have so fair parts of woman on you,

Have too a woman's heart: which ever yet Affected eminence, wealth, sovereignty."

"Pshaw, you dreamer of dreams and painter of pictures; it's a hollow show, an ugly travesty! What has a man like White to give such a woman? The husks of the prodigal!" Fox's luminous dark eyes kindled with anger. "When I see him—" he checked himself abruptly and walked on rapidly, his long, easy stride carrying him ahead of Allestree. "Pearls before swine!" he muttered to himself after a moment, plunging his hands into his pockets and relapsing into an angry silence.

They walked on at a smart pace, having occasionally to thread their way single file through the increasing throng as the long blocks slipped behind them and they approached the heart of business life near Fourteenth street. When they came together again after such a separation Allestree asked Fox if he could come home with him to dine, but Fox declined rather curtly, pleading an early evening engagement, and Allestree said no more, having his own surmises as to the nature of that engagement, and being somewhat guiltily aware that he was not an entirely involuntary party to his mother's conspiracy to draw Fox away from a dangerous attraction. Both men were, in fact, conscious that a discord had arisen in their usually confidential relations, and neither of them desired to broach any subject which would add acrimony to the conversation; with the usual

masculine instinct of self-defense, therefore, they relapsed into silence. However, at the entrance of a large hotel on the corner, their hurried progress was interrupted to give way to a visitor who was crossing the wide pavement to her carriage, escorted by one of the attendants and a footman. The light from the lobby, brilliantly illuminating the space beneath the awning, outlined her as sharply as a silhouette against the darkness, and her figure—she was a young and slender girl—was thrown into high relief; the quiet elegance of her dress, the sables on her shoulders, as well as the large picture hat which framed her face, being merely superfluous accessories to beauty of a type at once unusual and spiritual.

Fox, startled out of a reverie which was largely pervaded by the personality of another woman, could not but observe this radiant picture; there was a vitality, a power of expression in every feature of her face and every movement of her tall, lithe figure which at once specialized her. She seemed to belong to a different race of beings from those who were hurrying past her through the fog, whose figures lost themselves at once to vision and memory, dissolving into the masses of the commonplace as completely as the individual sands at the seashore are lost in the larger sweep of the dunes.

She turned her head, saw Allestree and smiled. "How are you?" she said, with the easy manner of an old intimacy; "I hardly dare look at you—I know I broke the appointment and several of the studio commandments!"

Allestree had hurried forward at once, apparently forgetting his companion, and was helping her into her carriage. "You did," he said, "and shamelessly; but you must come and make amends."

She laughed, her hand on the carriage door, and her eyes, involuntarily passing him to Fox, were as quickly averted. "I will, on Saturday at twelve—will that do, Bobby? Don't be too exacting. I've a dozen engagements, you know," she added lightly in a tone of careless propitiation.

Fox did not catch his cousin's reply,

it was too low spoken, and in a moment the horses started and the carriage passed him on its way to F street. Secretly a little piqued at Allestree's failure to present him, and yet amused at his discovery of his cousin playing knight-errant to a beauty, Fox walked on a few moments in silence, aware that the other was not a little confused.

But at last: "Who is she, Bob, wood-nymph, dryad or Psyche herself?"

Allestree's face sobered sharply. "It was Miss Temple," he said, a trifle stiffly.

Fox gave a moment to reflection. "Ah," he observed, "I recollect, Judge Temple has a daughter. I had never seen her; I've heard her spoken of, though, a hundred times; her name is——?"

"Rose Temple."

William Fox glanced at his companion obliquely and smiled, but he made no attempt at pleasantry. After a little, however, as they approached the residential quarter and neared his club, where he intended to dine, he returned to the subject. "You are painting Miss Temple's portrait?"

"Yes, attempting it," assented Allestree, with marked reluctance; he felt it to be almost a sacrilege to speak of a piece of work which had become, in more ways than one, a labor of love.

He was indeed painting Rose Temple's portrait, for he was already a notable portrait painter, but he was doing it much as Raphael may have painted the Sistine Madonna, with a reverence which was full of ineffable tenderness and inspiration, and he was too keenly aware of Fox's intimate knowledge of him and his unmerciful insight into human motives to endure the thought of Fox in possession of his inmost secrets and on terms of friendship with Rose. Fox! one of the most enigmatical, the most dangerous, the most fascinating personalities—Allestree had seen the potency of that spell—to be brought in contact with any woman, and most of all with a young and imaginative girl.

After a moment Fox's laugh interrupted him. "My dear Allestree," he

said provokingly, "why not paint the Angel Gabriel?"

His companion, whose sensitiveness amounted to an exquisite self-torture, bit his lip and made no reply.

At the door of the club they both paused as Allestree prepared to take a car uptown while his cousin went in to dine.

"Sorry you can't come to us," he said in a tone which was a shade less cordial than usual; "mother will be disappointed; there is no one else coming, and she always counts greatly on a talk with you."

"Give her my love instead," Fox retorted, with easy kindness. "I'm sorry, but I dine here and then go up to the Whites'. I promised; there's to be music—or something—tonight."

Allestree slightly shrugged his shoulders. "So I supposed," he said drily, and signaled his car.

II

A FEW hours later William Fox presented himself at the home of the new Cabinet minister. He was an intimate habitué of the house; a fact which created no little comment in social and political circles, for Fox and White were naturally almost antipodal personalities and had often engaged in political controversies, which had inevitably ended in White's defeat at the hands of his daring and brilliant adversary. But it was not their antipathies or their rivalries in politics which aroused the gossip, of which Fox was vaguely and carelessly aware, but the presupposed existence of an old sentimental relation between him and White's wife.

The house was one of the old landmarks of Washington, and the true values of space and effect were, consequently, somewhat diminished by low ceilings and small, old-fashioned doors. As Fox entered he heard the buzz of conversation in the distance, in more tongues than English, and when the butler announced him he came upon a group of dinner guests who were gathered around the immense fireplace at

the end of the ball-room—a huge addition to the original house especially designed for the elaborate entertainments for which the host and hostess were already famous—and the warm glow of the leaping fire increased the effect and brilliance of the scene.

At his name the hostess detached herself from the group and tossing her cigarette into the fire held out her hand in greeting. "You inconsequent wretch!" she said, shaking an admonishing finger. "Late as usual—we expected you to dinner and M. de Caillou tells us that, instead, you made a great speech! Pray, what became of you afterward?"

"Total oblivion for the space of three hours," replied Fox gaily; "I come now to congratulate you! The next step will be Presidency, White," he added, as he shook hands with his host.

"If I can keep you out of it," retorted the secretary drily.

Fox laughed, acknowledging the intimate greetings of the other guests. At a glance he saw that the gathering was as notable as usual, and was secretly amused at White's attitude, which seemed to accept all this as his own achievement, ignoring the influence of his wife. The French ambassador was there, a Russian prince, an Austrian savant, an Italian ex-diplomat, the chancellor of the British embassy, two other Cabinet ministers, a literary celebrity, a Roman Catholic dignitary, and a somewhat notorious French journalist and socialist who had dipped his pen in gall during the controversy between France and the Vatican. Margaret's usual selections, Fox thought, with a smile, and noted that the only other woman was Mrs. Osborne, the former wife of an American ambassador to Russia, whose divorce had created a sensation as distinct and startling as her beauty, which was of that type which somewhat openly advertises the additions of art; a woman, in fact, who had given rise to so much "talk" that the old-fashioned wondered at Margaret White's complacency in receiving her and even admitting

her upon terms of intimacy at the house. But Margaret's personality was as problematical as it was charming. She stood now regarding Fox with a slightly pensive expression in her gray eyes, which seemed unusually large and bright because of the dark shadows beneath them, while her small head was set on a slender white neck which supported it like the stem of a flower. She was thin, but with a daintiness which eliminated angles, and she possessed in a marked degree, as Allestree had said, the talent for artistic costumes.

She rested her hands on the high back of a chair apparently listening to all, but actually attentive only to that which immediately concerned Fox and her husband, who were exchanging commonplaces with the purely perfunctory manner of men who cordially detested each other at heart.

"White only pretends indifference," said Louis Berkman, the literary genius, who was one of the famous writers of the day; "actually he is overjoyed at the exit of Wingfield; that is the very pith of the matter, isn't it, Mrs. White?"

Margaret shrugged her shoulders. "Why not?" she retorted; "what was it Walpole said?—'One tiger is charmed if another tiger loses his tail.'"

There was a general laugh at this, which always followed Margaret's careless and daring candor.

"It was certainly a case of 'heads or tails' with the President," Louis Berkman retorted, with the ease of political detachment in the midst of the inner circle of officialdom; "we shall have a budget now which will carry a billion-dollar naval increase."

"You've lived too long in England," said Fox amusedly; "you don't get our terms, Berkman. But we shall insist on Mrs. White christening all the new ships."

"To be sure—I forgot that I was speaking to the money supply, Fox," he replied; "heaven help White if he gets into your clutches; I should as soon expect mercy from an Iroquois Indian!"

"I don't mind that from you,"

laughed Fox—"we expect anything from the 'outs'—as long as you don't write us up for the magazines!"

"The gods forbid!" said Berkman sharply, "I'm not 'the man with the muckrake'; now if—" He turned his head and, catching a glimpse of the French journalist engaged in an animated discussion with the Italian ex-diplomat, who fairly bristled with suppressed anger, he bit his lip to hide a smile.

One of the secretaries leaned forward to select a new cigarette from the elaborate gold box on the table. "Berkman," he remarked, "I read that article of yours on the Duma with a great deal of interest, but I got an impression that you lost sight of the main issues in your passion for artistic effects."

The author responded at once to this challenge with an eagerly indignant denial, and Fox found himself again slightly detached from the group and still standing beside his hostess. She had been taking no part in the conversation and seemed to be in a dreamy mood which ignored alike her environment and her social duties. There was always something in Margaret's aspect which differentiated her from other people, a spiritual aloofness from the passing moment which could fall upon her suddenly, even in her wildest and gayest moods, and which always carried with it a mystical, uninterpreted suggestion of some tragic destiny, which cast a long shadow before it across the unthinking sybaritism of her life.

"It seems some time since I saw you last," said Fox; "the House has been very exacting lately and abominably dull. What have you been doing with yourself?"

"Oh, learning to dance," she replied. "I'm to be a merry-andrew now, you know, for the delectation of the dear public. Wicklow insists that I must have public receptions; good heavens, what an endless bore!"

Fox smiled. "He takes it seriously, then, I see! We must look higher, in that case; you may as well study for the White House rôle at once."

Margaret laughed derisively, glancing across at her husband, who was leaning over Mrs. Osborne's chair with a quite apparent air of absorption. "Look at them!" she mocked, her eyes gleaming with malicious mischief; "see the pose; Lily Osborne is playing now for a Madame d'Épinay, she discusses French literature and the philosophers. Can you imagine Wicklow as Jean Jacques? I must get him a black cloak!"

Fox laughed involuntarily, but said nothing; Margaret's free speech sometimes offended his finer discrimination, and the notion of criticizing White to White's wife did not coincide with his masculine code. "I heard that Mrs. Osborne won the cup at the fencing contest," he remarked, after a moment.

"She did; Wicklow gave it, you know," Margaret smiled sarcastically. Then she looked at him suddenly. "Where did you dine tonight?—with Allestree?"

"No, at the club. I really didn't understand that I was expected here."

"I must have forgotten how to write notes, or I have too much else to say to you. I'm going to let Bobby Allestree paint my portrait; you know he's been trying to do it for years."

Fox smiled. "I admire Allestree's work," he said, "but there are limitations; one can't paint intangible sprites."

"Do you mean to infer that I'm not human?" she retorted, with a frown. "Wait and see how beautiful I shall be."

"You don't really want compliments from me, Margaret?"

She was silent a moment; then she lifted her softest glance to his face, her own pensive again and slightly shadowed with thought. "No, I don't!" she said abruptly; "I don't think I should believe in them—it makes me shiver sometimes to even imagine what you must think of me!"

Fox hesitated how to reply; he was by no means a prudent man, but he was instinctively aware of the dangers of her mood, and he had swiftly entertained and rejected two or three answers which would have led them

into yet deeper intricacies, when they were happily interrupted by the approach of the French ambassador.

"We have heard so much of those dancing steps, Mrs. White; when shall we have the pleasure of seeing them?" he asked, smilingly courteous and attentive.

"Oh, now!—on the instant," Margaret retorted, her mood changing like a flash and her eyes sparkling a gay defiance; "there's no time like the present. William, are the musicians there?"

Fox looked across at the palm-screened alcove and, catching a glimpse of a violin, assented. She clapped her hands. "Tell them to play me the Spanish piece which they played on Tuesday," she commanded.

At the first note there was a general cessation of conversation and every eye turned quickly toward her. She stood in the centre of the room, her slender arms raised and her hands clasped behind her head, a dreamy expression on her half-lifted face, the shadowy masses of her pale brown hair framing a white brow. Her eyes drooped, her whole aspect seemed to change, like the chameleon's, to become an embodiment of the dreamily seductive strains which floated softly into space; then, as the music quickened and developed, she began to sway slightly, dancing down the long room alone, her clinging, shimmering skirts trailing around her feet, flowing in and out, but never seeming to arrest the wonderful rhythmic swing of her movements. With her dancing was an interpretation of music, an expression of some subtle mystery of her nature, the very personification of an enchanting grace.

There was an almost breathless attention on the part of her guests, and no one was conscious of the displeasure on White's flushed face. No one but his wife; as she danced to and fro, weaving in the fantasy of strange figures, her eyes rested occasionally on him, and the mockery of her glance was a revelation to those who could read it. It was but little observed, however, nor was she understood when at last with a

sudden swift movement she caught up her filmy draperies, displaying two slender ankles and a pair of wonderfully shod feet as she executed a deliberate fandango which not a little amazed the more sedate of her guests.

In answer, perhaps, to some secret signal of White's the music stopped abruptly and with it Margaret's astonishing performance. Quite unmoved, and ignoring the interruption, or rather treating it as the natural termination of her dance, she turned with a graceful swirl of gleaming silks and received the rather effusive applause of her guests with heightened color and flashing eyes.

Louis Berkman alone had lost all the bizarre effect of the finish, and been absorbed in the dance. "A poem in motion! superb!" he exclaimed, with such genuine enthusiasm that Margaret's expression softened.

"Of course you are all enthusiastic—all except you, William," she said abruptly, whirling around to confront Fox with a teasing glance. "You are mute; didn't I please you?"

He smiled. "You bewildered me; the sudden transitions are confusing. Where did you learn the dance?"

She put her head on one side. "Last week—that's all I shall ever tell you!" she replied; "but I want Bobby Allestree to paint my portrait dancing. Wicklow would prize it so highly," and she laughed wickedly.

"Allestree is painting a portrait now, I think," Fox said, to turn her aside from a dangerous channel; "Miss Temple's, I believe."

Margaret's eyes widened and she looked keenly at him, an indescribable change in her face. "Rose—yes," she said slowly; "have you seen her?"

He shook his head. "I saw her for the first time tonight."

She made no immediate reply. M. de Caillou and Berkman had begun to talk together, and the others were already engaged in animated conversation; the controversy between the Italian and the Frenchman having been resumed was rising in a staccato duet. Fox was abruptly aware of a stir in the room beyond and surmised the arrival

of evening guests, but his hostess was apparently oblivious.

"She is supremely lovely at times," she said quietly, after a moment, "but—but not exactly a beauty. What do you think of her?"

Fox parried the question easily. "My dear Margaret, I only saw her for a moment getting into her carriage."

She gave him a searching glance and bit her lip. He thought he had never seen her wear so entirely the air of a spoiled child, her flushed cheeks, her slightly rumpled hair and the angry droop of her eyes, all appealed for praise and resented criticism. "Allestree is painting her on his knees," she said, with a little bitter laugh; "he doesn't regard her as human; you will see that he will make me the imp to her angel, he——"

"Margaret!" White was hurrying forward, with the ruffled manner of an affronted host; "are you blind as well as deaf, my dear?" he asked curtly. "Here are your guests!"

She turned haughtily and looked over her shoulder, her smallest attitude always seeming to defy him, while Fox had an uneasy feeling that he was more acutely aware than usual tonight of the impossible relations between the two. Meanwhile, the entrance to the long room was already filling with the rapidly arriving throng, which seemed, to the casual observer, a mass of satin and jewels and lavishly exposed necks and shoulders, with here and there a sprinkling of the black coats of the men.

In spite of this influx, however, the young hostess stood a moment longer looking at them with a glance of malicious amusement in her drooping eyes, noting the whole effect of White's large and rather florid personality as he received the first enthusiastic advance, responding genially to the murmur of congratulations. Then she turned and swept across the wide intervening space, her small head thrown proudly back, her whole grace of figure and dignity of pose in direct contradiction to her former wild gaiety and audacity. But Fox found it impossible to as easily free himself from the haunting

sorrow of her beautiful, haggard eyes. Sometimes she seemed to him to be as fragile, as exquisite and as perishable as a bit of delicately carved ivory. Yet he was forced to dismiss the analogy, for ivory, no matter how marvelously carved in imitation of a living creature, is inanimate, while she was the very personification of unrest; it seemed rather that some wild and beautiful sprite must have been enthralled into temporary captivity, and was wearing its way to liberty through the exquisite clay which had been fashioned into human shape for its mortal disguise, that the touch of inevitable sadness which sometimes came upon her was the moment when the sprite relapsed into the melancholia of prolonged captivity.

III

It was a little past noon on Saturday when Rose Temple went to Allestree's studio accompanied by Aunt Hannah Colfax, a faithful old negro woman who had been devoted to her from childhood and now performed the dual duties of maid and duenna with all the complacency and shrewdness of her age and color.

Passing the quaint show-windows of Daddy Lerwick's curiosity-shop on the first floor, in which were displayed—in amazing medley—pewter cups, old line engravings, camel's-hair shawls and horse-pistols, they ascended the long, narrow flight of stairs to the rooms above. On reaching them Aunt Hannah promptly ensconced herself and her knitting under the window on the landing, while Rose pushed aside the portière and entered the studio, unconsciously carrying with her some of the crisp out-of-door atmosphere from which she came and of which, in her buoyant and radiant youth, she seemed a visible and triumphant embodiment.

"It's perfectly angelic of me to come today, Robert," she remarked, as she greeted him, "for I'm not in the mood for a sitting, and of course, I shall behave abominably."

"And you wish me to be bowed in the

dust with gratitude for your angelic determination to behave abominably?" he replied drily, looking at her with all an artist's perception of her beauty and a reluctant consciousness that the glow in her eyes and the color in her cheeks were purely responses to the keen Winter air, and that neither had ever been inspired by his presence nor called into being by his words.

Meanwhile Rose moved unconsciously before the long mirror, and removing her hat, slightly and deftly rearranged her beautiful and luxuriant hair as she answered him. "Why not?" she said banteringly; "you can't believe that anyone likes to pose for an hour—even to be made into one of your delightful pictures—but I'll try to behave beautifully if you'll answer all my questions, instead of painting away with a cigarette between your teeth and the face of a sphinx, as you did the other day!"

"When you asked a dozen questions I couldn't answer!" Allestree was selecting his brushes and contemplating the canvas on his easel with a despairing eye.

He had already outlined Rose's figure and decided on the desired pose, but it seemed to him impossible to do justice to the exquisite charm of her beauty. It was a simple picture; he had endeavored to preserve what seemed to him the keynote of her personality, and had forborne to use any of those effects of brilliant color, rich draperies and elaborate accessories which a portrait painter commonly loves to lavish on a beautiful subject; instead, he had made her figure, with its superb poise, stand out in absolute simplicity.

"I do not remember asking anything but the simplest questions," she remarked, as she took her seat in the carved arm-chair which he had placed for her before a curtain of soft deep blue which seemed to suggest an April sky; "only you didn't want to answer them. I warn you that I mean to be answered today! There's nothing so abominable as your silences."

Allestree smiled a little as he began to paint, with a slow and reluctant touch, feeling his way toward

some achievement which might at least foreshadow success. "I fancied there was a virtue in silence; there's a copy-book axiom to that effect," he remarked; "besides, you never come here at all punctually if you are not left in doubt on some mooted point. Mystery lures a woman as surely as magic."

Rose gave him a reproachful glance. "And you think I like to sit here and listen to Mammy Hannah snore while you smoke and paint?" she said in a vexed tone. "For you always smoke and she always falls asleep."

"Which is a special providence," he retorted, "and the greatest virtue I ever met in a duenna."

Without replying Rose looked absently around her, observing the details of his workshop more carefully than usual, and noticing the harmonious effect of the colors, which he had grouped in his hangings.

"Shall you paint for a living if you are ever poor?" she asked abruptly.

Allestree looked up, and smiled. "Shall you sing?" he asked, amused.

She sighed softly. "I wish that I might—and in opera too!" she replied. "I fear I should today but for father. You think me a very useless person, I see," she added, smiling a little, "and perhaps I am. But isn't it because I've had no chance? Girls are trained up in such an objectless way unless they are brought up to marry. Thank heaven, I escaped that; father is as innocent of such designs as a baby! But if I had been a boy I should have been given a profession, I should have had something to do instead of being expected merely to dress well and look ornamental!"

As she spoke her face lost a little of its vivid color and animation.

He did not immediately reply. "Perhaps my point of view is too concentrated to be of much value," he said at length; "to me the mere fact of your existence seems enough to compensate for the loss of a good many more actively employed and earthly individuals who must be working out your privileged season as a lily of the field."

She gave him a quick, slightly amazed look, and blushed. "You speak as though I were selected from the rubbish heap!" she exclaimed, laughing, "as though I profited by the misfortunes of others. I don't know whether to regard it as a compliment or not!"

But Allestree was quite unmoved, absorbed indeed in his work. "Did I ever pay you a compliment, Rose?" he asked, after an instant, meeting her glance with one that was so eloquent of deeper feeling that she withdrew hers, vaguely alarmed.

"I don't believe you ever did," she replied hastily, with an instinctive desire to put off any suggestion of passion on his part, for much as she liked him and long as she had known him, Allestree was only a lay figure on her horizon. The channel into which their talk had unconsciously drifted so alarmed her indeed that she rose abruptly and went to the window and stood looking down into the street.

"Robert," she said suddenly, after a moment's embarrassed silence, "who was that with you the other evening? Was it Mr. Fox?"

Allestree glanced up quickly, and then stooped to pick up a brush which had dropped to the floor. "Yes," he said quietly; "how did you happen to recognize him?"

"I was not sure—but I've seen two or three pictures of him in the magazines and the weeklies. One can't forget his head, do you think?" and she came slowly back to her chair, unconscious of the change in Allestree's expression.

"Well, I never tried," he confessed. "I've known William Fox all my life, and he's my own first cousin besides. It's rather odd, by the way, that you never met him; but then you have been away from the city when he has been here."

Rose regarded him thoughtfully, her composure fully restored. "He has a very remarkable face," she observed, "and it is fine and pale like a bit of old ivory."

"Oh, yes, all the women fall in love with him," Allestree assented with impatient irony.

"Do they? That doesn't sound interesting, but I should not believe it of his face, he doesn't look like a ladies' man! Is it true," she added with a moment's hesitation, "that he has never loved anyone but Margaret White?"

"It's true that Margaret treated him abominably," said Allestree bluntly; "she was engaged to him when they were both very young, and threw him over to marry White."

"What a singular choice!" Rose observed. "White has nothing attractive about him, and he is so selfish, so hard; they say he treats her badly."

"He should—in poetic justice," replied Allestree, laughing, "for she married him for his money and his position. Fox was a poor man then, with no prospects but his brains and, strange to say, Margaret underestimated their possibilities."

"And yet she is very clever. Did he really feel it so much?" she added.

"Now you are beginning to ask me your unanswerable questions," he retorted, smiling grimly, with a keen sense of annoyance that Fox could intrude so sharply into their talk. "I know he was very much in love with her then, but he is on good terms with them both now and—" He stopped abruptly; his quick ear had caught a step on the stairs accompanied by another sound which startled him with an impatient certainty of a surprise.

It was the tread of a large Scotch collie, who lifted the portière on his nose and walked deliberately into the room. Allestree laid down his brush with a peculiarly exasperated expression.

"Well, Sandy," he said, not unkindly, addressing the dog.

Rose turned and held out her hand. "What a beautiful creature!" she remarked; "whom does he belong to? Who is coming?"

Her companion gave her an enigmatical glance, observing the collie as he approached and laid his head against her knee. The step on the stair had now reached the landing, and they heard Aunt Hannah's chair scrape as she moved and her knitting needles rattled

on the floor, for she had been startled out of a nap.

"Who is it?" Rose repeated, framing the question with her lips.

"Fox," replied Allestree drily, laying down his palette and lighting a cigarette; "he has an uncommonly retentive memory, it appears."

She glanced at him quickly, a suddenly illuminated understanding in her eyes, and blushed exquisitely, for she was still young enough to be easily embarrassed. At the same moment Fox pushed aside the portière and entered the room.

"Hello, Bobby," he began, and then paused abruptly at the sight of Rose. "I fear I'm an intruder," he added courteously.

Allestree smiled grimly and presented him to Miss Temple. "On the contrary, I think you got the time pretty closely," he remarked ironically.

Fox laughed. "Guilty!" he exclaimed with perfect good humor; "down, Sandy!" he added sharply to his collie. "You've bewitched the dog, Miss Temple; he rarely makes friends with strangers."

"Then I appreciate all the more his advances," she replied, smiling. "A dog always knows a friend."

"And an honest man," said Fox. "I'm free to confess that I don't trust one who dislikes dogs."

"Every man has his crank," remarked Allestree, walking to and fro before his easel, "and if you begin on dogs with William there's no end."

Rose laughed, glancing from Allestree's slightly vexed countenance to the serenity on the brow of his cousin, who had seated himself on the edge of an elaborate brass-bound chest which was one of the studio properties. "I can sympathize, Mr. Fox," she said; "we've always had dogs."

Fox gave her one of his brilliant, inscrutable looks. "I entirely agree with Lamartine, Miss Temple," he replied; "when a man is unhappy God gives him a dog."

"Good Lord, Billy, are you making a bid for our sympathy?" exclaimed Allestree with exasperation.

Both Fox and Rose laughed merrily. "He's only quoting the modern classics," she replied gaily.

"What I should like to know is how he gets out of school in the middle of the day," said Allestree; "for a man who is supposed to be a leader, he manages to desert at the most remarkable moments. One of the party whips told me the other day that Fox was as hard to trail as a comet."

"Nothing of the sort," replied Fox, with indolent amusement; "we adjourned over, last night, until Monday, and I came around here as usual to sit for my portrait."

Allestree bit his lip, conscious that his irritability was thrown into sharp relief by his cousin's imperturbable good humor, and resenting, with a sting of premonition, the effect of Fox's pose upon Rose Temple. He was not a dull man and could not close his eyes to the fact that she had apparently come to life, revived and animated by Fox's entrance, and he knew well enough the interest that the touch of romance in his past history added to his cousin's brilliant personality. However, it was useless to sulk at the inevitable misfortune which had destroyed his hour with Rose, and he turned his attention to hospitality.

"Will you make tea for us, Rose, if I set the kettle boiling?" he asked, as he drew forward the table. "I've got some cakes in the cupboard and a few sandwiches."

"Why, of course; it will be delightful," she assented readily, rising from her chair to help him find the tea caddy. "I'm eternally indebted, Mr. Fox; he's going to let me off a half-hour's posing," she added, smiling over her shoulder at him.

He laughed, moving over apparently to study the half-outlined portrait on the easel, but really enjoying the sight of the graceful figure bending over the table, and her delicate hands engaged in opening the caddy and measuring the tea into Allestree's old teapot. As she did so the light from the window fell vividly on her bright head, and the exquisite details of her profile, the curve

of her cheek and chin, the thick-lashed white eyelids, the short upper lip, the little pink ear, all engaged Fox's critical and appreciative eye.

"You'll have to take lemon," she said, "for Robert never has cream unless it's sour; but do you take sugar?"

"He takes three lumps to a cup," interposed Allestree bluntly; "but he'll probably deny it—he's a politician."

Fox laughed. "And in the house of my friends!" he said; "but that is only a *coup d'état* on his part," he added, "to keep me from asking for his last lump, Miss Temple; I saw him looking for more just now."

"We'll draw lots for it, Robert," said Rose gaily, taking her seat at the table and smiling across at Fox from pure pleasure in the little unconventional picnic.

But Allestree's attention had been arrested by something in the street below, and he interrupted them with a gesture of despair. "Mrs. Osborne is coming!" he announced, with a grimace.

Rose glanced hastily at the clock. "Oh, I must be going," she exclaimed; "I had no idea it was so late!" and she rose hurriedly and reached for her hat.

Allestree murmured something uncomplimentary to his approaching visitor, and Fox set down his cup of tea. The first tremor of an earthquake shock could scarcely have broken up the little group more abruptly. Rose had put on her hat and adjusted her filmy veil, and it was Fox who helped her with her coat and her furs. Allestree, instead, threw a cloth over the picture on the easel.

Rose held out her hand. "Good-bye," she said, with a charming smile. "I know I'm a trying model, but you're a perfect angel of patience, Robert."

As she spoke there was a frou-frou of skirts in the hall, and Lily Osborne came slowly and gracefully through the portière. She was a handsome woman with an abundance of reddish-gold hair and long, black eyes which had the effect of having no white, a peculiarity possessed by Rachel and also, we are told, by the devil.

The two women bowed stiffly and

Rose slipped out, attended by Fox and Sandy, leaving Allestree to devour his chagrin and receive his accomplished visitor.

IV

ALLESTREE lived alone with his widowed mother in a roomy, old-fashioned mansion in one of the older residential sections, which stand now like decadent environs of the more brilliant quarters where the millionaire and the multimillionaire erect their palaces. But these changes, in matters of fashion and display, did not trouble the serene bosom of old Mrs. Allestree, who felt that she held her place in the world by the inalienable rights of birth, blood and long established family position, for, happily, she had as yet no notion of the shadowy nature of such claims in the event of financial disaster, which is as impersonal as the deluge. She was contentedly aware that her old-fashioned drawing-rooms had been the scene of many a brilliant gathering even before her nephew, William Fox, became such a figure in the public eye that his frequent presence in her house was enough to draw there the most distinguished and representative men at the capital.

Rejoicing in the rich memories of a varied past, when she had known all the great men of her day, old Mrs. Allestree delighted in observing the world of fashion from her retired corner, and, though devoted to her son and admiring and believing in his talent, she sometimes suffered a keen pang of regret that her sister and not she had borne William Fox. But she was jealously afraid of this secret thought, scarcely admitting it even to herself, because of her intuitive feeling that Allestree had already suffered and might suffer more at the hands of his brilliant and careless cousin, and that he was supremely gifted in the refinements of self-torture.

It was twilight, and Mrs. Allestree sat alone by her drawing-room window watching for her son's return from his workshop.

Within was an atmosphere of repose and comfort; the tea-table was set by the open fire, and the rose-patterned silver tea-kettle was emitting a little cloud of steam when Allestree finally opened the door.

"Well, mother, you here alone in the dark?" he remarked, as he turned on some light and revealed the warm homeliness of the large old-fashioned room.

"Never less alone than when alone," she retorted brightly, and then, glancing shrewdly at his slightly perturbed expression, she added: "You'll take some tea; you look tired."

"No," he replied, throwing himself into an easy-chair by the fire, "Rose made some tea in the studio, and it's too late now for another cup."

"So Rose kept her appointment? I hope you got on with the portrait."

Allestree shrugged his shoulders. "Impossible; Fox came and then Lily Osborne. The gods don't mean that I shall finish that picture. And Reynolds painted several of his best in eight hours!" he added despairingly.

But his mother ignored the latter part of his speech. "Fox?" She glanced at him keenly. "Then the House adjourned?"

"Yes, and he knew Rose was to be there." Allestree laughed a little bitterly. "It was the merest chance in the world; he was with me when I met her the other day. Of course he came in as handsome, as gay as ever—and as careless!"

Mrs. Allestree had left her seat by the window and was mechanically pouring out a cup of tea, her fine old hands under their falls of lace as firm and deft as a girl's. "I wish he was less careless," she observed quietly; "I've just heard some more gossip about him; Martha O'Neal was here to lunch. It appears that he was really selected for the Navy, could have had the portfolio for the lifting of his finger, and, at the last moment, when there was no apposite reason for a change, there was a deal and White got it."

"Well, we can't blame him for that, can we?" said her son, smiling. "You

know the saying is that the Administration will not 'stand hitched.'"

She shook her head. "That's not it—he made the deal himself; he deliberately favored White, and you can imagine what is said; everyone believes that silly story that he's desperately in love with Margaret still, and, of course, it looks like it. He could have saved Wingfield, and he didn't, and you know Mrs. Wingfield hates Margaret!"

"I don't believe a word of it," said Allestree calmly; "Fox is too much of an egoist. Probably he didn't want to go into the Cabinet; in fact, I've heard him say it was a safe receiving-vault for the defunct candidates. Can't the women ever forget that he was in love with Margaret?"

"Possibly they could," his mother replied shrewdly, "if Margaret wasn't in love with him."

"Good Lord, how you all flatter Fox!" her son exclaimed with exasperation. "For my part, I can't fancy that Margaret ever loved him; she treated him abominably to marry White, and now she has everything she wants, money, luxury and power; she's a perfect little sybarite."

The old woman looked at him with an expression of affectionate tolerance. "My dear boy," she said quietly, "Margaret is wildly unhappy; that's the reason she behaves so outrageously. Have you heard of her latest? She danced a kind of Highland fling or a jig after her dinner the other night. White was furious, and they're telling a story of an open quarrel after the musical when he swore at her and she laughed in his face."

"White is a brute, but Margaret chose him with her eyes open," he replied, "and I think Fox feels it. At any rate, there's nothing in that gossip about Wingfield; he had quarreled with the President. You know the story is that he was found walking up and down his hall, the Wednesday after Congress met, shaking his fist and shouting about the message. 'That damned message!' he said, 'it will ruin the party—if I'd only been here!' He

was away at the time it was written, and, of course, that paragraph did virtually condemn his administration of the department. He had to resign; that goes without saying!"

"I suppose so, and Mrs. Wingfield talked; we all know what a tongue she has!"

Allestree laughed, leaning back in his chair with his hands clasped behind his head. "Well, she's going, anyway."

"But she isn't," sighed Mrs. Allestree; "she's to stay over two months, heaven knows why!"

"The Lord deliver Margaret, then!" exclaimed her son, still laughing.

Mrs. Allestree nodded sagely. "Margaret can hold her own though, Robert, and everybody knows how she has insulted Mrs. Wingfield. Margaret's *bons mots* have convulsed the town time and again. You know, as well as I do, that it was Margaret who set half the stories going about her. Margaret can do and say the most shocking and heartless things at one moment and be the most charming creature at the next. Really, sometimes her treatment of White is impossible. Even Lily Osborne professes to be shocked at the dance the other night."

"Mrs. Osborne is a hypocrite," retorted Allestree scornfully; "by the way, I'm to paint her portrait. I put it at a figure which I thought was prohibitive and precluded all possibility of an order, but she closed it at once, without turning an eyelash."

Mrs. Allestree gave him a long, comprehending look. "White pays for it, then," she remarked drily.

"Of course," he replied, "and White pretends to quarrel with his wife's wild ways!"

The old woman set down her teacup and looked mournfully into the fire. "It's a terrible business from beginning to end," she said finally; "when I think of those two poor babies! Little Estelle is just beginning to notice things, too, and Margaret seems utterly indifferent to them. What is the world coming to?"

Allestree laughed and patted her

hand. "You can't regulate it, mother," he said cheerfully.

"Heaven forbid! There are too many divorces; one can't go out now without meeting men with two wives and women with a plurality of husbands; yet we are objecting to seating the Mormons in Congress!"

"After all, is a divorce worse than such a marriage as Margaret's?" her son rejoined, indolently enjoying the controversy.

"There should have been no marriage," she retorted firmly, pushing back her chair and rising with a rustle of silks. "White could never have loved her; he hasn't been true to her for a moment. Her beauty pleased him, or that charm which is more subtle than beauty and which makes her what she is. Now he's lost his head over the gorgeous coloring, the flesh and blood of Lily Osborne; she would have pleased Rubens, Robert. By the way, Martha O'Neal told me of a curious rumor about her; it is said that she is in the secret employ of the Russian Government; you know she has no conscience."

"A spy?" Allestree laughed. "But why here? We've done Russia a good turn; it's Japan that is chewing the rag."

"Robert! what a disgusting expression. But of course you know the tales of the Black Cabinet and that our embassy despatches were tampered with."

"Now you're in your element, mother; you love a mystery!"

The old woman put her hand on his head, stroking back his hair with a fond gesture. "Tell me about Rose," she said, watching him narrowly, with all her maternal intuition alive; "did she sit patiently—and will your portrait please you? That's really the only question; everyone else is sure to be pleased."

He shook his head. "I can't get it to please me," he replied quietly; "after all, Rose's beauty is less a question of feature than I thought. I might interpret a soul if I were a Raphael or a Fra Angelico—as it is, it will never look like her."

"Nonsense! Rose is very human;

don't put her on too high a pedestal, my dear," his mother counseled wisely; "you are too sensitive, too imaginative. Fox would never make the mistake of treating a woman like a saint on a pillar!"

Allestree made an inarticulate sound and rose also. "Fox—no!" he said a little bitterly; "Fox could make love to Saint Catherine without offending her; he's one of the men whom women love!"

His mother smiled, but made no reply; at heart she was fully aware that there was much truth in the saying. Old as she was, she felt the indescribable spell of Fox's genius, and knowing her son's heart as she did, she foresaw difficulties in the way of his happiness if his cousin should forget his old love and find a new one. Much as she had desired and endeavored to break up the unfortunate intimacy between Fox and the Whites, she had not foreseen that her own son's happiness might be, in a way, dependent on Margaret's power to hold her place in the regard of her early lover. As she stood looking at the fire in silence the shrewd old woman reflected that the ways of Providence are inscrutably hard to divine and that, after all, it is sometimes fatal to thrust one's hand into the fire to save a brand from the burning.

V

THAT Mrs. Allestree's divinations were not very far short of the truth, or unlikely of fulfilment, would have been apparent to her could she have looked in, a few weeks later, on Rose and Fox together in Judge Temple's fine old library.

Rose sat in a high-backed chair by the open fire, her bright head and slender figure outlined against the dark background, while she listened, with all the freshness and enthusiasm of girlhood, to Fox's gay, easy talk, his dog, Sandy, lying stretched on the hearth-rug between them.

Fox had recently made a great speech, a speech which had filled both the floor and the galleries of the House to suffocation, and even thronged the corridors

with spectators who could gain no admittance, yet, while it had thrilled Rose's pulses with excitement and enthralled her with the spell of its eloquence, her rigid sense of the proprieties had been shocked; she had felt its flowing periods, its scornful references to mysteries which seemed to Fox as rotten as they were immaterial, and the fact that she had taken umbrage at phrases of his which seemed to him sufficiently innocuous to escape all criticism amused and pleased him. It was a new point of view; he liked to tease her into expressing a shy opinion, or into a sudden outburst of righteous disapproval which brought the color to her cheek and the sparkle to her eye. It delighted him to feel that even disapproving of him she could not hate him, for in their dawning intimacy he found ample assurance of her liking, and the unguarded friendliness of her feeling showed in her eagerness to win him to her side on any mooted question.

He leaned back in his chair, watching her with a keen appreciation of her loveliness and her unconscious betrayal of her own emotions. "So! after all, you didn't approve of me the other day?" he said, with perfect good humor; "you were really condemning my ethics while you applauded—you know you did applaud, you told me you congratulated me on my 'great speech.'"

Rose returned his teasing look seriously. "I did congratulate you; it was a great speech, but I didn't like it," she said in a low voice and with an evident effort.

"And why?" he asked, his brilliant gaze bent more fully on her.

"I didn't like the tone of it; you belittle your own great gifts," she said softly, hesitating slightly and choosing her words with care; "you make them of your own creation when they are really given you, given you as the five talents were given to the man in the Scriptures. You haven't laid them away in a napkin; why, then, are you ashamed to give the glory where it is justly due? You can't deny that there is glory in it all!"

He smiled. "You make me feel like

a thief. To be entirely honest, I'm not religious, but I read the Bible and Shakespeare as dictionaries of eloquence. Do you think me a dreadful sinner—worse than those on whom the tower of Siloam fell?"

Rose bit her lip. "I've no doubt you think me a hypocrite!" she replied.

"I should like to tell you what I think of you," he said softly, leaning forward, his elbows on his knees, looking across at her, "but I'm afraid—afraid of you!"

She laughed a little with a charming diffidence, for she had met the sweetness of his glance, which was full of gentle admiration.

"I sometimes wonder," he continued, "how you would meet a great moral question which involved your happiness and, perhaps, that of another whom you loved."

She shivered a little, stretching out one slender hand to the fire. "Ah," she said, with a faint smile, "I hope I may never meet such a question! I see you make me a Pharisee."

"God forbid!" he replied quickly. "You belong rather to the Christian martyrs; I'm either a Barbarian or a Scythian!"

They both laughed softly at this, and Rose forgot her momentary embarrassment. "I should try to be just!" she said.

He shook his head with that rare smile of his which seemed half mocking, half caressing. "You couldn't be!" he retorted provokingly, "you are a little Puritan, narrow, firm, righteous; I begin to be more and more afraid of you!"

His manner wore its happiest aspect, it was delightful to be with her; through all contradictions he began to feel the temperamental sympathy, and she, too young to understand these subtleties, was aware of the glow and warmth of his presence, the sweetness of his manner, which could be, when he was neither stern nor angry nor self-absorbed, one of a delicacy and sentiment uncommon in a man; with all his egotism, his spoiled acceptance of the world's homage, he retained qualities

that were inherently noble and lovable.

"But I have more reason," she declared with warmth; "it's unworthy of you to espouse any cause for the mere sake of party, 'to stand pat' when your heart is against the issue; I don't believe in it!"

"You have been reading revolutionary documents; you are full of this new heresy," he retorted, still laughing softly; "you are like some of the new politicians; they pull down the pillars of the temple on their own heads."

She leaned forward eagerly, her eyes sparkling. "Do you know what this party worship reminds me of?" she said, "this devotion in a man to his party? The tomb of Rosicrucius and the statue which crushed the worshiper who entered there! So your party's graven image crushes out a man's originality."

"Little heretic!" he mocked; "little revolutionist! A party is a great machine; we can't do without it!"

She shook her head vehemently. "The children of Israel thought they couldn't do without the golden calf! You were not so strong a party man five years ago, do you remember?"

He looked at her quickly. "Do you?"

"I read your speeches," she confessed with charming ingenuousness, her eyes kindling with emotion; "I read the first speech they ever printed in the newspapers here. I've wanted to tell you how beautiful I thought it, how eloquent!"

He regarded her a moment in silence; he felt suddenly that there had always been a link between them, that across space and time he had spoken not to the public, but to her, and even been understood by her. Then he was as suddenly and vividly conscious of his folly, his egotism, his unworthiness! She was too lovely and too innocent to have received the impression of his spirit; and he—the thought of his careless life, his worship at Margaret's shrine, the strength of the old fetters which bound him made him suddenly humble. And then the beauty of her smile, the warm sympathy of her tem-

perament created an angry impatience of such restrictions; with characteristic scorn of conventionalities he thrust them aside. The perfect innocence and spontaneity of her praise and appreciation was the most subtle of all flattery, and he possessed the temperament of genius which is, at one moment, above the consideration of either praise or blame and the next quivers with sensibility at the breath of either. He returned her shy but glowing look with one of unusual humility.

"I feel as if I didn't deserve it," he said gently; "it is an exquisite happiness to be praised by you!"

She smiled. "And I feel ashamed to have set myself up as a judge," she replied quickly, "but it was because—because I didn't want you to fall below your own standard! You see what it is to have a record of great achievements."

"Hereafter I shall only seek to deserve your praise," he rejoined; "but I feel myself a sublime egoist. I've sat here talking of myself, of my work, and meanwhile I remember that my aunt told me of your voice. Why do you never sing for me?"

"Because you have never asked me," she replied simply, with an involuntary smile.

Fox leaned toward her with an eloquent gesture of appeal. "Did I deserve that? Am I such a miserable egoist?" he exclaimed, and then: "I ask you now."

Rose was entirely unaffected, and she went at once to the piano in the room beyond and, seating herself, began to play the first soft notes of a prelude.

It was a simple Italian love-song, soft, caressing, gently plaintive, and peculiarly suited to her voice, but the air and the words were nothing compared with that voice. When Mrs. Allestree spoke of it Fox had thought of it as the usual vocal accomplishment of a raw schoolgirl, something young and sweet, no doubt, but full of crudity and weakness. Instead, he was suddenly aware that he was listening to a voice which had a scope and richness

beyond any that he had ever heard except in opera, and there were but few of the great singers who had such a gift as this. He found himself listening with a keen feeling of depression. His mind drifted back to the sweeter and more sacred relations of life, to those simple emotions which approach more nearly the divine. The complex affairs of the world, of politics, passion, intrigue, slipped away from him, and the holier aspects of a pure and devoted life took visible shape to his imagination in this young and beautiful girl. He had never fully appreciated his own susceptibility to the uplifting power of music, and the charm of her voice seemed more poignant because so unexpected.

As she finished singing her hands slipped from the keys into her lap and she turned and looked at him, smiling.

"Exquisitel" he said, and she blushed with pleasure, knowing that he could not express his appreciation in words.

She laid her hand in his, rising, too. "Thank you," she exclaimed; "I am so glad!"

As she spoke and while he still held her hand, intending to tell her how profoundly she had moved him, they were both suddenly aware of someone's entrance, and turned to see Mrs. White standing just inside the drawing-room door. She had entered unannounced, and stopped abruptly as she came upon the little scene. She was elaborately dressed in black velvet with ermine furs, and an immense bizarre hat of violet velvet and chiffon with masses of violets on the wide brim. Under her arm was a toy Pomeranian as black as her gown and as glossy as silk, its little black head just appearing over her immense ermine muff. She had evaded the servant's intention of announcing her; she had thought only of surprising Rose at her music and had come upon this! She stood still, a sudden spiritual perception sweeping over her and thrusting a blade of agony into her heart. Every vestige of color ran out of her cheeks, her gray eyes dilated. When they turned they sur-

prised a look on her face which distorted its usual gaiety and defiance. Then she thrust it aside with a great effort of will, with the force of a new and vivid determination, and greeted their amazement with her light little laugh.

"Caught!" she said. "Next time I shall send a footman—or ring a bell!"

Rose came forward with a blushing but eager welcome, but Fox stood in a moment of awkwardness which both vexed and amused the woman. Men have no resources, she thought bitterly.

As for him he experienced a shock of dismay; he was trying to shake off a vague feeling which possessed him that he had no right to be there, that he owed allegiance still to Margaret, that her look, her manner, her very presence demanded it, while, in fact, she had long ago forfeited all claims upon him.

Meanwhile she had led the way back to the library, driven Sandy away from her Pomeranian, and was seated in Rose's chair, an elegant and conspicuously important figure, at once the centre of the stage; she had one of those personalities which are immediately predominant in society. "So," she said lightly, "this is why William deserted my Sunday afternoons; I should have looked for him in vain!"

"It seems you are yourself a deserter," Fox retorted; "this is your day at home."

"You thought me safely anchored?" she laughed, with a mocking intonation, caressing the Pomeranian's ears. "I should be, but I had to make a call of condolence. Wicklow insisted; you know he's so conventional and so determined upon being the popular public man! Mrs. Wingfield lost her grandmother two weeks ago, so, of course, I must call and make my condolences!"

Fox laughed softly; her manner brought back the normal tone of affairs, and he knew her moods to perfection. "Of course you condoled?" he said.

She shrugged her shoulders, looking at Rose. "My dear," she said, "you will be interested; no mere man could understand. I've always been un-

certain in my mind about the correct mourning for a grandmother; now I know—it's settled beyond appeal."

"By Mrs. Wingfield?" Rose smiled her incredulity.

"By Mrs. Wingfield—it's shrimp pink!" Margaret said. "She had on a tea-gown with lace ruffles; it was a violent, vivid shrimp pink, and her nose was red. Of course I said all manner of appropriate things. Everybody stared, then I made a grand finale and departed. She was furious. And Wicklow sends me out to make his way for him!" and she threw out her hands with a little gesture of despair.

"Why do you tease that poor soul so?" Rose protested, laughing. "She falls an easy prey, too. I heard they were going abroad soon."

"In three months," Margaret said, "to the Riviera; they tried Switzerland, she told me, a year ago, but she found 'it wasn't really fashionable.'"

"Margaret!" Rose shook an admonishing finger, "you make her say such things; you know you do!"

Mrs. White raised her eyebrows, her eyes haggard. "One would suppose me a Sapphira. She truly said it and I kept asking her what she said; she repeated it twice—they were all listening, of course, and M. de Caillou tried to look plaintive."

"He's solemn enough anyway, Margaret," Fox said, amused; "he might well be shocked at your levity."

"Oh, I always want to make him sit up and beg for a lump of sugar," she retorted scornfully.

As she spoke she rose and went to the window, looking out with an abruptness of manner which seemed to take no account of their presence. She was struggling with an overwhelming dread; with the keen intuition of unhappiness she read Fox's mood, and her very soul cried out against it. But she was an actress, an actress of long training and accomplishment. She turned carelessly, lifting her Pomeranian to her shoulder and resting her cheek against its long black fur. "There's my motor back," she said, catching a glimpse of it through the long window in the drawing-room.

"I'm going home to receive Wicklow's public. Can I borrow Fox, Rose?"

Rose turned easily, mistress of herself and aware of his annoyance, keenly alive to the possibility that his old love for Margaret might still be a factor in his life. "I'm afraid I haven't asked Mr. Fox to take a cup of tea," she said, laughing. "Father is late and you know we dine early on Sundays; we're very unconventional and old-fashioned."

Margaret was trailing slowly to the door, her velvet draperies and her long ermine stole seeming heavy and burdensome on her slender figure. "Oh, I know," she retorted, "you're Old Testament Christians; I'm always expecting to see the scapegoat caught in your fence-railing! In spite of my shortcomings, though, you are going to sing for me some Sunday, Rose, and make my sinners think they've found the gate of paradise."

But Rose shook her head, laughing. "Ask father," she said; "he declares that I shall not exhibit!"

VI

"MAMA, give me the beads!"

Margaret turned reluctantly and looked down at the child, a girl between five and six years old, without even the ephemeral beauty of babyhood, and showing already a strong resemblance to her father. "By all means, only don't swallow them; it's after the doctor's office-hours," she replied carelessly.

She was seated before her toilet-table, clad in a silk kimono, and her maid had just finished doing her hair and gone in search of some minor accessories of the toilet, for her mistress was dressing for a large dinner at Mrs. O'Neal's. Meanwhile Margaret sat looking into the oval mirror in front of her, making a keen and critical survey of her own face and figure. As she did so she moved a candle slightly, and thus throwing a stronger light on her features was startled by the haggard look in her eyes, the purple rings beneath them, the hollowing of her cheeks. Was she begin-

ning to lose her beauty? The thought alarmed her, and she leaned forward, looking at herself more closely. Yes, there were lines, and she was thin, deplorably, unquestionably thin. The vivid misery of her expression in this unguarded moment was apparent even to her. Heavens, did she look like that to others? The thought was pregnant with fierce mortification; she must be wearing her heart upon her sleeve! And Fox? Was she losing him? The keen pang of agony which had shot through her at the sight of Fox and Rose together, at the glimpse of that little scene by the piano, recurred to her with a burning sense of humiliation. Was she to taste this bitter cup also?

She had known for years the miserable mistake of her choice of White, she had groveled in the dust of repentance, but there had been one drop of honey in the cup of gall, one saving grace in the situation: she was sure that Fox still loved her, that he would be true to her. No other woman had been set up in her shrine. She knew how deep the hurt had been, and she had fondly believed that she alone could heal it. Through all those arid years, those years of gaiety, of luxury, of false happiness and false show, she had hugged her secret to her heart: Fox still loved her!

And now? What had she read in the kindled sympathy of that look at Rose Temple? She bit her lip, staring into the mirror with haggard eyes. Could he give her up? She, who knew so much of the brutal egotism of which a man can be capable, she who had seen such a nature as White's revealed in the scorching intimacy of married life—dared she picture Fox as unselfish enough to be still true to her, to content himself with comforting her wretchedness when love and youth and beauty—beauty such as she had never worn—might be his? Her sore heart throbbed passionately in her bosom. She had expiated her mistake, she had suffered for her fault, she had a right to be happy! She would be happy; it is the eternal cry of the human soul.

"Every pitifulest whipster," says Carlyle, "seeks happiness, a happiness impossible even for the gods." And Margaret's wilful soul cried out for happiness; why should it not be hers? She was shackled, it was true, with fetters of her own forging, but—the eager thought of liberty darted through her mind like an arrow—others had been so bound and were now free, others were making new lives out of the old, and the ease with which such ties can be dissolved was not the least of her temptations.

Her glance fell suddenly on the child, Estelle, playing soberly with the amethyst beads which she had begged for. The little girl had learned to be quiet; if she was noisy or in the way she was immediately dismissed to the nursery, and she had her lesson by heart; she was making no noise but a soft crooning sound as she fondled the beads. Her hair was flaxen, her face dull and not pretty, her eyes like her father's. Margaret shuddered and averted her gaze; how cruel that she should look like him! And the baby, only two years old, but already like him; she felt it her curse, the retribution of her loveless marriage, that these two living and visible links to bind her to her vows were both like the man she had married without love and without respect, because she could not give up her life and its luxuries to be poor. A marriage with Fox then would have meant the renunciation of everything which seemed to her essential to existence, it would have combined the miseries of cheap living and self-denial, of small and hideous economies, which made her shudder even to contemplate; she had always been a sybarite. Brought up by an extravagant, pleasure-loving mother, by a father who had spent all to live well, Margaret had been unable to conceive anything more horrible than genteel poverty, and White had offered her a dazzling vista of wealth, position, social success. She was very young, raw, untried, and the temptation had been too great.

As she sat there, idly, at her toilet-table, again came the haunting thought;

it had beset her lately, tempted her, teased her. It was so easy, it would be so easy to break the bonds, and who could blame her? To be happy!

"Mama, it broke!" Estelle cried suddenly, with a quivering lip. "I didn't do it!"

Margaret turned and looked at her. "No matter," she said strangely; "it broke easily, didn't it, Estelle? Thank heaven, one can break chains!"

As she spoke there was a knock at her door, and White himself entered. He was not a large man, but his face was broad and heavy, his hair had been light, but was now gray above the ears, and his jaws were slightly purpled by high living. There were some who thought him distinguished, chiefly those who always perceive a halo around officialdom and wealth. Actually he belonged to that type of man who has been in clubs, political and social, from boyhood, who has unlimited money, a mighty egotism and the unfailing preference for his neighbor's wife. Meeting Margaret's challenging glance he paused near the door, his hand on a chair, and looked at her with a cold, fixed eye which neither changed nor wavered as he spoke.

"I have something to say to you," he began in a hard dry tone; "it seems to me about time to speak out. I don't know what's come over you; you're clever enough, but you seem to forget that I'm a public man. You were absolutely rude at the reception this afternoon, and your whims are intolerable. It's all very annoying! If I choose to open my house to the public I expect my wife to accept the rôle and play it to the end."

Margaret looked at him. "I fail to understand you," she said ironically; "is this a lecture?"

"You may call it what you please," he retorted angrily, walking to and fro; "you know well enough!"

She shrugged her shoulders. "I'm dressing for dinner—you'd better wait until another time," she remarked, with a yawn.

"There's no time like the present," he said harshly; "your manners were

detestable today; you treated people like dogs!"

She laughed bitterly. "For instance," she said, "Lily Osborne?"

"Mrs. Osborne knows better than to care!"

"She should!" Margaret mocked, "she should expect it; I congratulate you on her admirable humility."

He gnawed his lip, the veins swelling in his forehead. "I warn you!" he cried fiercely, "I will not permit such behavior—your dance at the musical is the talk of the town, and now you receive people who come here with indifference—and I'm a Cabinet minister!"

"Which is a miracle!" his wife replied, laughing softly and provokingly; "you made a mistake in your marriage, Wicklow; you should have chosen a more popular person."

"I'm aware of my mistake!" he retorted, still walking, and picking up first one knickknack and then another and setting them down again; "I was a damned fool! I thought you witty and fond of society; I fancied you a success, and you can be one if you choose, but everything's upside down with your whims. You keep Fox hanging around here—you know that he and I are at sword's points in politics, you know that he——"

"Leave him out, please!" Margaret interposed in a cold, hard voice. She had risen and her eyes glowed with passion.

White turned a lowering look on her. "Fox didn't marry you!" he said cuttingly; "he was too wise!"

She made no reply; she could have answered that she had given up Fox to marry him, but the sting of the insult cut her to the quick, his allusive, familiar tone was a whiplash. She turned away, her white face set, a singular light in her eyes. The passion of her hatred of him at that moment was almost beyond restraint; her very flesh quivered under the throb of her maddened nerves. His coarseness, his brutality, his sensuousness revolted her; she felt, under the sting of his lecture, a mere bondswoman, and her

fetters burned into her soul. It seemed to her that she could no longer breathe the same air with him.

The child caught her sleeve timidly. "Mama, don't!" she whispered, "please don't make papa look so—I'm afraid!"

Margaret looking down at her saw anew that hateful likeness. "Go away!" she shuddered; "you're just like him—I can't bear it; go, I tell you!"

The child's hand dropped and her lip quivered with impotent anguish; she could not understand, but she read her mother's chilled, repellent look and it frightened her still more; she drew her arm across her face and fell away with a sob. Margaret, whose heart would have been touched at another moment, hardly heard her.

"I want you to understand," White began again, angrily, unmindful of the little girl's presence, "my position. I'm a——"

Margaret interrupted him with an impatient gesture. "Gertrude is coming with my gown," she said coolly; "I think you may spare me any more at present."

White turned with a frown, and seeing the maid at the door with her arms full of white satin and lace, he gave way with a growl of discontent while his wife smiled calmly at the startled girl and bade her hurry; it was nearly eight o'clock.

At the dinner Margaret was the most conspicuous and observed figure at the table; she was strikingly dressed in white satin, her lace bodice fastened on the shoulders with jewels, her long, slender throat wound with pearls, and the black lace scarf—which she wore in deference to her hostess, who was dining a cardinal—only accentuated the peculiar pallor of her face and the whiteness of her bare arms. She was radiant, witty, vivacious; her reckless tongue never ceased its unmerciful chatter. She talked Spanish to the Spanish ambassador, Italian to the Papal delegate who sat opposite, she entertained the cardinal.

White watched her with an increasing feeling of uneasiness; he read defiance in her manner and began to dread some overt challenge; he had been untimely in his remonstrance, and he felt it too late.

Meanwhile their hostess loved the fair offender, and aided and abetted her in her wild sallies. Martha O'Neal was an old, old woman, the widow of a famous and wealthy jurist, and she was herself famous as a hostess and a social leader. Her eyes were still bright and keen, though her hair was white as snow; she knew everybody, everybody knew her; a worldly old woman who pursued society with the eagerness of a young *débutante*, played bridge for high stakes, smoked cigarettes in an exquisite holder of gold and amber, hurried to receptions, balls and routs with a tottering gait and a slightly vibrating head; a woman of large knowledge of the world, shrewd political partisanship and, withal, an eager and determined Roman Catholic. Her dinners were famous; no more than ten ever sat down at her table, and usually five or six was the limit; she believed in conversation, not in isolated pairs. She had a service of gold; she would have no lights but candles. Huge candelabra were set in niches in her walls and on her table; her cut glass was famous, her roses the rarest money could purchase, yet nothing was lavish, nothing glaring or vulgar or new.

The old woman, with the keen perception of long social training, had discovered all Margaret's gifts as an entertainer, and her occasional outbreaks—as the famous dance and other not less bizarre performances—only gave her an additional value as an element of the unexpected. Mrs. O'Neal, therefore, rarely gave a dinner without asking Margaret, though she included Margaret's husband with a grimace and a shrug. Tonight she was delighted with her guest's gaiety, her wit, her endless vivacity, and she watched her across the wide table with some curiosity, much too keen not to observe the haggard misery which Margaret tried in vain to hide. The dark, Italian face

of the delegate, the broad heaviness of White, who wore a perturbed frown, the keen, fine lines of the Spanish ambassador, the placid, commonplace fairness of the ambassadress, the vivid coloring of Lily Osborne, the thin, ascetic face and keen eyes of the cardinal were all in sharp contrast to the pale face, the shadowy hair, the brilliant eyes of Margaret White. Mrs. O'Neal, watching her, wondered and was amused.

The dinner was a splendid affair; the delegate talked with the smooth ease, the habitual guarded courtesy of the Italian churchman, the ambassador was genial and responsive, the cardinal said little, throwing in a word now and then, but a word which set the ball rolling, and Margaret never failed. She had never appeared so witty, so sweet, so dangerously amiable.

It was over at last, the cardinal leaving early, and as he rose to depart the women present being all ardent Catholics except Margaret rustled forward to kneel and kiss his ring, while Mrs. O'Neal, following the old custom abroad, had bidden her footmen bring the candles, and the Romanists present were gathered at the head of the stairs to light his eminence to the door.

There was a little pause, and Margaret, a slender, white-robed figure, her shoulders veiled in a diaphanous black scarf, came forward to bid the cardinal farewell. White, who stood apart, uneasy and conventional in the midst of the dramatic little scene, turned in time to see her kneel devoutly and kiss his eminence's ring.

They drove home early through the lighted streets and neither spoke a word during the short drive to their own door. The footman helped Margaret with her wraps and attended her up the steps; White had entered ahead of her, and when the servants were gone and she had crossed the hall to the stairs he called her. She turned, with one foot on the lowest step and her hand on the balustrade, and seeing the deep flush on his heavy face she smiled a little with a slightly scornful shrug.

He looked across at her with an expression of savage anger, ill-suppressed. "Your conduct passes all patience!" he said bitterly, controlling himself with an effort; "you know where I stand, that I want to be President, and you flaunt your defiance!"

She returned his look, her head thrown back, her eyelids drooping, the delicate hollows in her cheeks apparent in the half light. "Pray, what is it now?" she asked provokingly.

He gnawed his lip, the cords standing out again on his forehead. "You know," he said in a low voice, "you make yourself ridiculous by kissing the cardinal's ring! I don't care a damn for your religion, but I do care for the Protestant vote; they'll have this in the papers!"

She laughed a tormenting laugh. "I'm thinking of becoming a Romanist!" she said.

He stared at her—words were inadequate, but his face whitened. The slim elegance of her figure in its splendid dress, her dusky hair, the dazzling white of her forehead, all seemed to him so many additional reasons to hate her. He had bought her for these things, for her charm, her wit, her daring, and she had turned every weapon against him and defied him. He felt a shiver of rage sweep through him, controlled it and turned away at last with clenched hands.

She remained standing, one hand on the balustrade, the other lightly holding her cloak, which was slipping from her bare shoulders, and her eyes followed him with ineffable scorn and mockery.

VII

MEANWHILE William Fox was plunged deeply into the vortex of a busy session. The holidays were over and Congress had settled down to its task; it was the short session year, and the bulk of the large supply bills were being pushed steadily through the House—the routine of business being constantly interrupted by the fanfaronade of noisy members and the agitation of tariff re-

vision, which hung like a nightmare over the party in power, and was a delightful fetic for the minority to drag out of its hiding-place and dangle before the eyes of their opponents. Fox, who was a leader, besides being a great orator, was constantly employed in holding down his followers, stamping out any sparks of rebellion and silencing the enemy.

He was sharply conscious, too, of the tongues which were busily engaged in circulating rumors about him, for there was more than the proverbial mustard seed of truth in the story which Mrs. Allestree had heard. He had indeed been on the point of entering the Cabinet, but White's double dealing and not his voluntary surrender had been the cause of the exchange. There had been an agreement between the two men, who were both from the same State; White had been allowed to come to the Senate to serve out an unexpired term of two years under a pledge to keep out of Fox's way in the matter of Cabinet changes. He had broken his word at every point and had succeeded in a shrewd manœuvre to prejudice the Administration against the more clever man, no difficult matter where jealousy of Fox already existed. Moreover, White had the inevitable prestige of great wealth, powerful connections and an easy conscience.

Fox had known many of these things when White received his portfolio, but his later discoveries had placed him in a position where he no longer cared to be so frequent a guest in White's house; to break bread with the man who had wilfully maligned him was an offense to his coldly scrupulous pride. Fox was careless of public opinion, fond of indulging his own whims and fancies, and easy in his tolerance of offenders against himself, but when a man transgressed the laws that he laid down in matters of personal honor and integrity he could be uncompromisingly severe and contemptuous. Of late, therefore, Fox had absented himself from White's table and from those evenings—famous among the favored few who obtained invitations—when Margaret entertained

the brains and the talent of the capital. Literary men were always there, artists, musicians, scientists; it was said of Mrs. White that she would entertain a famous thief if he had wit. But there had been another and a more potent attraction for Fox: he had found the seclusion of Judge Temple's library, the old judge's slow and studious speech, the magnificent voice of Rose, more potent charms than the conversation and music of Margaret's *salon*. Having discovered the temperamental sympathy and ingenuous friendship in this young and beautiful girl, Fox had begun to pursue that interesting study of character which leads to but one result—whether it be tragic or happy.

At this stage, too, of the matter Fox ignored the feelings and the possible claims of his less brilliant cousin; he was aware that Allestree loved Rose, but he considered it as an affair of little moment, because he perceived clearly that Rose did not love him, that not even the most scrupulous adoration on his own part could convert her indifference into a more tender feeling toward the painter. At first he had entertained very little serious thought of the matter, but the charm of Rose's personality, both spiritual and physical, had very soon begun to take hold of his imagination, and if he secretly compared her fresh, sweet immaturity with Margaret's worldliness and finish it was to plunge the thought instantly into oblivion. The girl was so young, so fresh, so easily responsive to his wit and his eloquence, that it was like discovering a pure and beautiful flower in a hedge of thorns. Between his work, therefore, and his study of Rose he had managed to refuse more than one invitation to the Whites', and his absence was beginning to be sharply observed.

There was a rumor that White had quarreled with him about Margaret, that Margaret had herself openly dismissed him, that he was vexed at the loss of the Cabinet place; in short, the usual crop of idle, ingenious stories which spring up in the height of a Winter season, like a growth of noxious weeds, were in full bloom and strength.

Fox was watching the slow progress of an important bill through the lower House, and busily engaged at the same moment on the Naval Appropriation Bill, in which White was intimately concerned and which offered a wide scope for the surmises of those who were watching the two men. It was an open question whether Fox intended to thwart the Secretary of the Navy or to support his effort to get a larger appropriation. Conscious of the scrutiny to which he was subjected, Fox worked on, with an enigmatical smile, and betrayed nothing of his thoughts or his position.

It was late one Thursday afternoon and he had been speaking on an important matter for more than an hour, endeavoring to close up a question which threatened to be of international significance, and, thoroughly fagged, he finally left the floor of the House amid a tremendous outburst of applause. As usual the galleries had been packed to hear him, and he managed to make his way out with many delays, stopped on all sides by members and personal friends, eager to congratulate him on another great speech.

Once out of the lobby, he was crossing the corridor on his way to a committee-room when he heard his name spoken, and turned, to see Margaret detach herself from a party of fashionables who had been in the Diplomatic Gallery, and come toward him. As they met he was immediately aware of the change in her that a few weeks of absence had made sharply apparent. She was extremely pale and her eyes seemed abnormally large and shining under the brim of her immense picture hat, her elaborate dress only accentuating the slightness of her figure. She held out her hand without smiling. "I want to speak to you," she said, almost with an air of command; "where can we go?"

He turned, hesitating a moment, as to some suitable spot, and arrested by the thought that Margaret's presence there or anywhere, alone with him, would be so much fuel to the fire.

But she solved the problem for him.

"Come outside," she said. "It's heavenly on the terrace; the sun is setting. Besides, I can't breathe here in these corridors—heavens, where do they get their tobacco?"

"Not where you buy your Egyptians," Fox laughed.

She shrugged her shoulders. "The doctor says I mustn't smoke any more," she said, "but I shall."

"The doctor?" Fox cast a startled glance at her white face. "What's the matter, Margaret?"

"A cigarette heart, I suppose!" she replied, laughing, and then as the smile died on her lips an expression of dull misery fell like a veil over her features.

They had crossed the Rotunda together and gone out by the same door where Allestree had waited months before. As they emerged upon the terrace they were enfolded in a radiant atmosphere, the sun was setting, and the whole western façade of the Capitol, the fluted columns of the loggia before the old library rooms, the long rows of shining windows, the magnificent arch of the dome, were bathed in the glowing light which seemed to flood the world. There was still a little snow on the sheltered slopes of the terrace and under the trees, but the promise of spring was in the air and in the deep blue of the sky above them. Margaret stopped abruptly and stood looking down at the panorama at their feet; absorbed in her own emotions, she did not immediately perceive the expression of her companion's face; it was one of extreme reluctance, of reserve, almost of resentment. He had a man's hatred of a scene, of being "talked about," and he knew that such a circumstance as their tête-à-tête at such a time could scarcely escape unnoticed. He was annoyed and disturbed, but for once she was blind to those potent signs.

Keen as Margaret's perceptions were, she shared with other women the passionate blindness to change in another when her own heart was clamoring to be satisfied; her vision was warped by one aspect of it all; she remembered those moments, long past, of comradeship and sympathy and passion on his part:

she remembered and she refused to believe that change was even possible.

The silence for a moment was almost oppressive, then she spoke without trusting herself to meet his eyes. "You have refused two invitations to dinner, and you have quite deserted my evenings and my Sundays," she said in a low voice.

Slightly embarrassed he began some conventional excuse, but she lifted her hand with a peremptory little gesture. "I know—I quite understand," she said. "Wicklow has behaved abominably, but—am I to suffer, too?"

"My dear Margaret," he replied, without too deep emotion, "such a possibility is absurd!"

She looked up, searching his face, and her smile was the shadow of itself, pale and suddenly controlled. "You do not mean to accept his hospitality again?" she said, with an effort.

He was deeply annoyed; why must she force this issue upon him? He was capable, at times, of extreme hardness toward others. Today she was unfortunate enough to jar upon him, to recall too sharply White's conduct. "I'm not prepared to say," he replied with some impatience; "can't we avoid the subject? Tell me of yourself, Margaret; you look tired and pale."

She bit her lip, a sudden color refuting his charge. "I am very well," she replied coldly; "I danced until two this morning; at eleven I received a delegation of Wicklow's jackdaws; at two I lunched with Madame de Caillou. At four I came here with Mrs. O'Neal and Lily Osborne; I give a dinner to-night and then go to the opera. It is much the same tomorrow. Have you a cigarette, William?"

He opened his case and she selected one and lit it; Fox was not smoking. "It will be in the newspapers tomorrow that I was seen with a cigarette on the terrace talking to the next President," she remarked drily. "I mean you to be the candidate," she added; "Wicklow is playing for it, but—" She laughed, blowing the cigarette smoke into rings before her face.

"He will probably be nominated,"

Fox rejoined easily; "he has a large following. I shall like to see you in that rôle, Margaret."

"To see me?" she shrugged her shoulders; "my dear William, do you happen to know what Lily Osborne is doing?"

He laughed. "Ask me something easier!"

"She is using Wicklow to attain her ends," Margaret said, a little mocking smile on her pale face; "he is dull and infatuated. I am told she's in Russian employ and there is information, plenty of it, in his reach. You mark my words, she'll ruin him—he'll never be a candidate."

Fox frowned. "Pardon me," he said abruptly; "I cannot listen."

She tossed her cigarette over the terrace and watched it descend, a mere spark in the dusk below, where evening lay in purple shadows. "Forgive me," she returned lightly, "I forgot—men are such conscientious creatures and I—I'm an unscrupulous wretch, but I'm not cruel, William!"

"Nor I!" he replied, with a slight change of color; "but, Margaret, can't you see how impossible—?"

She laughed bitterly. "I'm very dull," she remarked.

A sudden recognition of some new, terrible barrier between them tore her heart. She held out her hand. "Good-bye," she said in a low voice. "I'm going to ask you to dine again—will you come?" Her feverishly glowing eyes fixed themselves on his face.

Fox colored again, conscious that he must seem an ill-mannered brute. "Of course I'll come," he assented, vexed at himself and touched by the sudden sweetness of her manner.

But her smile was wan; she felt as if the universe moved beneath her feet; as yet the moment was delayed when her wounded heart would refuse to submit and her whole passionate nature rise up to battle for life and love.

VIII

ROSE let the bridle lie loosely on her horse's neck as they halted at the elbow

of the path. Rock Creek, leaping over its gray boulders and flowing between them with little swirls of foam, comes rushing madly past, slips under the trailing branches of a weeping birch and, suddenly widening, hushes its tumult and drops placidly below the ford, where, in Summer, in a wide shallow basin, the swans and the little white ducks lie.

Fox, who was riding with Rose, dismounted, and turning back the dead leaves on a sunny slope found a single spray of arbutus. She uttered a little exclamation of pleasure, holding out her hand.

He laughed. "When I was a boy I always found the first wild flowers," he said; "I knew just where the blood-root grew and the anemone. Since then I've been making speeches at the primaries and getting votes for my party. There's no comparison between the two pursuits!"

She had the arbutus in her hand and gave him a challenging glance; she began to understand him better, but her convictions were too strong to be subdued. "You mean that you've given up your life for politics, just to be a part of a machine?"

He assented, still smiling as he remounted, and the horses moved on at a walk.

"I can't see why you think it noble to be merely a politician," she persisted.

"Am I?" His amused eyes met hers.

"Yes!" she retorted. "A statesman is above his party, before it; he guides, moves, sways it. You like to call yourself part of a machine! You don't vote against a bill which concerns the party—that's being a politician!"

"But I can't betray my party," he objected, unmoved.

"You should be independent of it."

"You can't judge," he argued, with his teasing laugh; "your coat is of another color."

"Well, at least it isn't Joseph's!" she exclaimed, vexed.

"You think I can't be trusted?"

"I didn't mean that—of course party men can be honest, but I don't call it the highest honesty to vote

against convictions for any party."

"Yet that is what I did on a bill the other day," mused Fox, "because the party opposed it."

"Was it a good bill?"

"Excellent."

"And you voted against it when you believed in it?" indignantly.

"I'm the guilty creature," he replied, laughing in his eyes, but his face sober.

Rose bit her lip.

"You see it's a bad moment to make a split in the party; next year is the Presidential campaign," he continued provokingly.

She could not restrain her indignation. "Aren't you ashamed to go against your own conscience for that?" she cried; "it isn't worthy of you."

"Then you think better things of me?" he argued softly; "you see a chance for my redemption?"

She looked up and met his glance fully, but with a sudden feeling of confusion. "It is because you are meant for so much greater things that I speak," she said finally; "I think you will be a greater man than you are now at last."

"Your belief should make me so!" he said gravely; "a man might accomplish much to justify your belief in him!"

She averted her face, her lip trembling.

Fox leaned forward in his saddle, trying to meet her eyes, but seeing only the soft curve of her cheek and throat. "Will you try to believe in me?" he asked.

But she had touched her horse slightly and he shot ahead, trotting down the long road, his rider swaying and bending slightly to avoid an occasional sweeping bough. Fox followed quickly, and, overtaking her, the two horses galloped together while their riders relapsed for a while into a significant silence.

"Did you know that my portrait is nearly finished?" Rose said at last. "I think that Robert has painted it out and in again just five times."

"It isn't in the least like you," re-

torted Fox sharply; "he has made a failure."

"Oh, no, everyone likes it!" protested Rose.

"Not at all," said Fox more calmly; "I don't—neither does Allestree."

"He has too high a standard for his work," she replied, laughing, "but I hope you liked it."

"No picture of you could ever please me," he retorted significantly; "when I shut my eyes I can still see your face. Allestree's wits have been wool-gathering; he has made an image, nothing more—he—"

Rose interrupted, laughing. "Please don't tell father; he likes it, and Mrs. Vermilion was so pleased that she and Mr. Vermilion have ordered life-sized portraits of the entire family, *en masse* and singly; Robert's fortune is made."

"The Vermilions are parvenus," said Fox, with a shrug. "Poor Bob!"

"And why poor Bob?" she objected lightly; "it seems to me the greatest good fortune."

"Does it?" Fox looked down at the creek musingly. "And yet I say, 'poor Bob!'"

She colored, scarcely conscious of the cause of her blush, unless Fox's dreamy sympathy for Allestree touched a responsive chord in her own bosom when she remembered how lightly she had thought of him and his unspoken but candid devotion to her; a little thing, a word, a gesture reproached her with ingratitude, for how easily she had passed over all those years and forgotten Allestree in the charm of his cousin's presence! Then she remembered all the stories she had heard of Fox's love for Margaret Ward before she married White; steadily as she had tried to forget them, to cease to think of his past where it touched another woman's life, the stories suddenly took tangible shape, and it seemed to her that Margaret was concerned with his existence and she—a mere intruder. Rose, whose heart had been hitherto as untouched as a child's, shrank with infinite shyness and reluctance from those old dead leaves of passion which

had never yet sullied the whiteness of her soul.

Some intuition, perhaps, of her feeling warned him, for he began to tell her stories of his boyhood and gradually spoke of his home, his dead mother, his father, who had been a distinguished jurist, and so, little by little, won her from her mood. His gentleness, his kindling speech, the tenderness of his eyes thrilled her again with that wonderful attraction which was part of the man's genius and which even his enemies found incontrovertible.

He told her of his mother's gentleness, her profound religion, her meekness compared with his father's fierce severity, an Old Testament Christian who beat his boys if they did not go to church three times on Sunday and to meeting on Thursday nights. "And out of that home I grew up a heathen and a publican," he said, with a smile.

Rose looked steadily before her; far off the road dwindled, and she saw Sandy racing a squirrel to a tree.

"How can you?" she said at last in a low voice.

"Confess it?" He leaned forward and touched her hand. "Will you convert me?"

She looked up; their eyes met with the shock of sudden feeling. Her lip trembled like a child's. "I'm not wise enough," she replied simply; "you would end by laughing at me!"

His face sobered. "Am I so utterly unworthy?" he demanded.

She was silent; the water rushed and murmured beside them, and the still, bright atmosphere seemed to palpitate with some great mystery; were all barriers really disappearing and a new sweet understanding emerging from the challenge of their two opposing temperaments? Her heart trembled and beat fast at the thought; it was so wild, so improbable, so dangerously sweet. Then she made one great effort to master her emotions, to be herself. She schooled herself to meet his eyes again, with that new subtle sweetness of expression in them, that delicate understanding of her mood which frightened her!

"Who am I that I should judge?"

she said tremulous Creek, leaping over smile, full of you and flowing between scious confession. "Is of foam, come

Something in the slings, madness and purity of her face, and her unguarded mood, smote Fox with sudden humility; he felt himself the veriest worldling and sinner compared with her. What right had he to thrust his life into hers? His hand closed over hers with unconscious force. "Who are you?" he repeated passionately. "My guardian angel."

Rose smiled; there were tears in her eyes, but his emotion had the effect of crystallizing hers; she understood her own heart at last, and with a woman's intuition began to hide it; she withdrew her hand gently and the horses went on.

Neither spoke; both had been deeply moved and there was a new happiness in mere companionship.

IX

MARGARET leaned over the glass show counter and looked down at the pathetic medley within Daddy Lerwick's curiosity shop.

Her figure, in its usual elaborate elegance, was in sharp contrast to the dingy surroundings. She was interested in a bracelet set with topaz, still beautiful, still radiant, still warm with a life's history.

Daddy Lerwick himself waited on her. He was a short, thick-set man with the face of an underdone pudding, his gray whiskers attached like wings below the ears. His small dull eyes seemed to observe little, but he was notorious for driving a shrewd bargain, and nothing really escaped him.

"The stones are good stones," he commented, clasping his fat creased hands on the case in an attitude which displayed the solitaire on his little finger, "and the price very low, madam."

Margaret laughed, her eyes haggard again, "You get them second-hand," she observed carelessly; "who brought these?"

He looked at her without surprise and unclasped his hands. "I have the

name," he said; "the law requires that we take the name, but I don't think they ever give the right one, and we don't tell it—usually. It was a young girl, madam, quite a young girl."

"Never mind!" Margaret dropped the chain, her mood changing. "I really didn't want to know," she said, with a shrug, "why should I? I don't know why I asked. I'll take the gold cigarette-case, if you can get the monogram off, and the teapot. Bring them over and I'll send the cheque."

Then she trailed through the dingy shop and passed out by the side door, which Lerwick opened for her, to the stairs of Allestree's studio. As she ascended, the cloud which had rested on her face slightly cleared and her expression grew more decisive, the desolate misery of her heart had taken a more concrete form; she had arrived at last at a resolution. She had reached a point where she must resist or die. Her bruised heart throbbed with continuous pain and she was proudly aware that she was losing all—losing it, too, without an apparent struggle. She, Margaret, who had always borne herself proudly and defiantly to the world, was she to be a mendicant asking the alms of love and asking in vain?

She swept on, crossed the landing under Aunt Hannah's accustomed window, and thrusting aside the portière entered upon a tableau of the artist and his two new clients, Mrs. and Miss Vermilion, and her enemy, Mrs. Wingfield. The two older women, stout, tightly laced, gorgeously over-dressed, the younger, slender and well done by the best French art and with that indescribable air of disdain which, commonly assumed by the parvenu to be the sign manual of birth and breeding, might be called the bar sinister of society. At the sight of Margaret, however, she unbent with an alacrity which was as amazing as it was sudden.

"Dear Mrs. White," she chirped, "do come and advise me; mama wants me painted, and really I can't choose a pose! I saw a picture of the Duchess of Leinster which was lovely, but Mr.

Allestree says he never copies even attitudes! Isn't it confusing?"

Margaret shrugged one shoulder and held out two fingers to the elder women. "Try Aphrodite rising from the sea," she suggested, with a provoking drawl. "I dare say Bobby can do waves; he's admirable on flesh tints."

The girl colored furiously and bit her lip. It was impossible to know where to meet Mrs. White, she reflected, without daring to provoke another catastrophe by retaliation.

But Mrs. Wingfield had felt the sting of Margaret's rudeness too often. She moved to the door with the rustle of silk draperies. "I hear Mr. Fox is to marry Miss Temple," she said pointedly, looking Margaret full in the face.

"And I heard that Mr. Wingfield was to get the mission to Brazil," retorted Margaret unmoved.

Mrs. Wingfield's cheek crimsoned and the feathers on her bonnet trembled. "Nothing of the sort! You don't mean to tell me you heard that?"

Margaret shrugged her shoulders again. "One hears everything, you know!" she said, with a dangerous smile.

Mrs. Wingfield breathed hard and opened her lips, but Mrs. Vermilion was a wiser if a duller woman; she laid a restraining hand on her arm and propelled her gently but firmly toward the exit.

"You're coming to my ball next week, Mrs. White?" she ventured, with a propitiating smile.

"Oh, is it next week?" drawled Margaret, with elevated brows; "I never know. Little Miss English keeps my books; if she didn't I should go to the wrong place every night and forget the White House."

"I thought your memory more accommodating," Mrs. Wingfield retaliated pointedly; "I remember when you forgot to come to my dinner after you'd accepted."

Margaret laughed. "Did I?" she said. "I'm evidently a sinner. Tell Mr. Wingfield that I heard who wrote in those corrections in that paragraph of the message—but I really can't tell."

Mrs. Wingfield turned away with a red cheek.

"Margaret!" remonstrated Allestree sharply, as the three women withdrew, "how can you? Good Lord, talk about the brutality of men!"

She laughed, her short, even white teeth set close together, her eyes sparkling. "Wasn't I horrid?" she said; "I haven't any manners and they hate me."

"I should think they would!" he replied warmly. "Margaret, why do you do such things? It isn't like you, it isn't——"

"Well-bred!" she continued drily; "I know it. The other night, too, I did something that horrified Wicklow. We were dining at Mrs. O'Neal's; I knelt and kissed the cardinal's ring. Wicklow was wild; he seemed to have an A. P. A. nightmare at once. It was in all the New York papers yesterday." Margaret laughed again, resting her arms on the back of the curved chair where Rose had sat.

Allestree laid down his brushes; he had been working on a sketch of Margaret herself, and, lighting a cigarette, he passed his case to her. She took one mechanically and lit it at his. As the spark flamed up between them, he caught the hollowness of her eyes, the startling pallor of her face.

"What in the world is it, Margaret?" he asked sharply; "you're ill."

She turned and looked over her shoulder into the mirror. "Do I look so?" Something she saw in her own image, in the deeply shadowed eyes, the sharpened curve of the cheeks, startled her. "What a fright I grow to be! No wonder that Vermilion girl stared. What an Aphrodite she'd make—in French corsets and a trail!" Margaret laughed silently.

Then catching a look on Allestree's face which she read too easily, "Were you born proper, Bobby?" she said, knocking the ashes from her cigarette, "or did you achieve it, or was it thrust upon you?"

"I can't paint you in this mood, Margaret," he said; "you wouldn't look like yourself; you remind me of a malicious elf."

She leaned her elbow on the chair-back again, resting her chin in the hollow of her hand. "There!" she said, "I told William Fox that you'd make me the imp to Rose's angel."

"I'd like to make you what you are, a fascinating, wilful woman with no heart at all!" he retorted.

"No heart!" she laughed, tossing her cigarette away; "that's true, Bobby, I've no heart!"

As she spoke she moved over to Rose's portrait which still rested on an easel in the corner. She stood looking at it in silence, and turned at last and met Allestree's thoughtful glance. "Bobby," she said briefly, "you're a fool."

He smiled. "What else, oh, mine enemy?" he asked.

"Everything!" Margaret threw out both hands with a gesture which seemed to appeal to earth and heaven; "a blind fool, Bobby! You love her, she probably loves you, and yet you stand by and let her go! Fool, fool!" Margaret drew her brows down, her cheeks flaming.

Allestree lighted another cigarette. "My dear Margaret," he said, "let me show you this sketch of my mother."

Margaret bit her lip and stood watching as he turned over two or three sketches. As he did so her quick eye caught familiar outlines. "So that is Lily Osborne?" she said, with a hard little laugh. "I'm not sensitive, Bobby; let me see it. Did you know the latest gossip about her?"

Allestree shook his head. "Spare me!" he said, smiling.

"Not a bit of it; you deserve no quarter!" Margaret took the sketch and looked at it, ignoring the one of Mrs. Allestree. "It's good," she commented with amusement; "how fine and full-blooded she looks, and reptilian! The gossip is that she's caused the recall of the Russian ambassador; she's been telling tales out of school—the female diplomatist, you know! What did you do, by the way, when she met Rose here?"

"Oh, we got on," said Allestree, laughing; "what of it?"

"You haven't heard?" Margaret laughed. "Rose went there to one of madame's small and earlies; you know the kind. It seems they played bridge and Rose didn't understand it was for money; imagine a lamb in the hands of wolves! Poor little simpleton! Well, Lily told her at last that she owed two hundred. Rose fled home, and the judge—" Margaret laughed and shrugged her shoulders. "Old Testament Christian, you know! He sent the cheque, but he told Rose to cut her dead."

"I knew there was something; Rose never told me, but they speak," he rejoined, "the way you women do! In spite of your shrugs, Margaret, you know the ethics of the thing were abominable; it's swindling."

Margaret continued to laugh. "My dear Bobby," she said, "Rose isn't sixteen and we all play bridge; I lost six hundred last night; she should have known. It's tiresome to be a madonna on a pillar!"

"Still Rose was right," he said bluntly.

"Oh, granted!" Margaret touched his arm lightly. "And you love her!"

Allestree made an impatient movement. "Don't torture me, Margaret!" he said sharply.

She whirled around and held out both hands, her eyes moist. "I'm a brute, Bobby!" she cried; "forgive me—I always say the wrong thing unless someone sets me a copy; let's talk about Mahomet's coffin!"

X

WITH Margaret things had reached a crisis long before that culminating moment of remorseful emotion in Allestree's studio; at last the realities of life—as they appear separated from its pleasures and its follies—were forced upon her. Too young at the time of her marriage to comprehend its full significance, as a mere act of barter and exchange, she had never seriously anticipated her position as White's wife; it had been shrouded in a nebulous haze

of gratified vanity, of pleasures and indulgences, for she was glad to shirk the thought of it. Her awakening, therefore, had been accompanied with a shock of horror and disgust.

White had been kind to her at first; even the most common and violent of brute creatures is often kind to its chosen mate, and he was proud of her beauty, determined to get the value of his money out of her social distinction; but her capricious temper, her bitter tongue and her indifference soon had their natural effect. His kindness wore itself out and when angry he could be tolerably brutal, for his temper, at best, was coarse and exacting. She had come at last to look upon the beautiful house, the lavish display, the sumptuous living as so much gilded misery, and, possessing no talisman to give her contentment, her stormy nature spent itself in rebellion and in a growing regret for her own folly. She saw, at last, in Fox all the qualities which she most admired; her mind answered his with a subtlety, a kindred sympathy which seemed to assure her of his love, to justify her assumption that his feeling had never changed. In her eager pursuit of happiness she had thought to purchase it first with beauty, then with money and now with love—the beggar's price! It was the absorbing impulse of her being; religion she had none, except the religion of self-indulgence. Standing on the brink of disaster she still demanded happiness, it was her creed, her gospel, her divine right. The temptation of it, too, pursued her; how easy to obtain a divorce from Wicklow, a word almost and it was done! It was true that there would be a great scandal, but, after all, the scandal could only add a zest to her social success; she was young, beautiful, distinguished, and if she broke the shackles that bound her could she not begin all over again? Intoxicating dream—how full of temptation it was, of alluring sweetness! After all, does not the devil appear to us in the shape of an angel of light?

What were ethics compared with her inalienable right to be happy? The

thought of it made her draw a keen breath of relief. Free!—she alone knew the value of that word.

The children crossed her mind only occasionally; Estelle was more and more like her father every day, and as for the baby Margaret had only vague conceptions of his possibilities. She had seen but little of him since his birth, except in his nurse's arms, but she had recognized that odious likeness to the Whites. Of course old Mrs. White would take them; she adored them, and Margaret felt that she knew more about them than she did. After a while when they grew up—but Margaret could not afford to dwell upon it. They were associated with her misery, her captivity, as she chose to call it, and she could not love them; she shrank, indeed, from the thought of them, and the responsibility that their existence had thrust upon her, as so many links in her chains.

She returned from her interview with Allestree in a curious frame of mind. Her unreasonable discourtesy to the Vermilions and Mrs. Wingfield—people who really only hovered on the edge of her horizon—her insistent attacks upon Allestree's sore heart, had all been prompted by her own feverish misery. Once alone in her room she went to the mirror and, holding up one of the candles, gazed long and fixedly at her own reflection, asking over again the question she had asked herself on the night of Mrs. O'Neal's dinner. Had she lost her beauty? Was the potency of her spell destroyed in some mysterious way? Hideous thought—was she growing old?

She saw, indeed, all that she had seen in Allestree's mirror, and more; the misery that looked out of her own eyes frightened her, and there were more delicate lines than there had been on that previous occasion, or else the light was stronger. This was the reason, then, of the senseless stare of Miss Vermilion's china-blue eyes—Margaret wondered vaguely why girls of that sort always had china-blue eyes.

She set down the candle and sinking into a chair by the open fire began to

brood over her troubles, forgetful that she must be dressed soon for her own reception; it was the night when her weekly guests assembled at those already famous evenings. Her thoughts reverted to Fox; the remembrance of his love for her was like the sudden fragrance of violets in a desolate place.

He had loved her; it never seemed possible for a moment that a word, a sign, could not reanimate his passion, as a breath of air will strike fire from the smoldering embers. Now, too, she could appreciate and understand his love; she was no longer a raw slip of a girl or a stiff little Puritan like Rose Temple! But she knew the barrier which existed between them; never by a word or a sign had Fox trespassed against White's hospitality; he would never urge her to desert her husband, but if she were free—

She rose and began to walk about the room, touching first one object and then another with restless fingers; the thought of freedom was like wine, it went to her brain; the vision of the divorce court, the lawyers, the judges, the newspapers, floated into space. She stretched her clasped hands high above her head and drew a long breath; her soul almost shouted for joy. Freedom!

It was, next to happiness, the desired of the gods! And after all did not one involve the other, was not one absolutely essential to the other?

She wondered, with a smile, why they talked so much cant about marriage and divorce. Had they suffered as she had suffered they would rejoice, as she did, at the thought that there were divorces, that one could be free again!

Free—good heavens! Not to see him every day, not to hear his voice, with that mean, trivial rasp in it, not to be one of his chattels!

And Rose? Margaret did not allow herself to dwell too long upon that vision of the girl's young figure, her fair, animated face against the background of the cedars and the sky. Was she jealous of her? That was an ignominy too deep to contemplate without bitter self-abasement; she refused

to believe it! The shuddering certainty which had drained the life-blood from lip and cheek became now, on reflection, a fancy of her feverish brain. Such a raw, simple creature as Rose was no mate for William Fox; that indisputable attraction of opposites, which is one of the laws of nature, for a moment lost its significance in her eyes; she would not believe it. It was not quite natural for her, though, to take this view, even for a moment, for a woman, as a rule, has less faith in the endurance of a man's love than he has in it himself, because she has usually discovered that the heart of the ordinary male creature is uncommonly like a pigeon-cote!

She was determined to forget all these things; she walked to and fro battling with herself, her restless hands sometimes at her throat and sometimes clasped behind her head. The strong passion of rebellion which shook her being amazed even herself. She would never give him up! She could not—to Rose or to anyone; her starved heart cried out against surrender and defeat, he was hers—hers.

Her maid's knock at the door startled her, she stopped short and passed her hands over her eyes; her face burned; she no longer lacked color, her cheeks had the flush of fever. The girl, coming in to dress her, was surprised by the brilliance of her eyes, and began to lay out the gown and its accessories with nervous fingers, half expecting one of Margaret's wild bursts of temper. But her mistress seemed only concerned with her toilet; one gown after another was tried on and rejected until at last she was arrayed in a shimmering dress of violet and silver, which was as delicate as the tints of the sky at moonrise. She allowed no ornament on her white neck and arms except a single diamond star which clasped the ribbon around her throat.

Nothing could have been more perfect than her manner to her guests. It was one of those occasions, growing constantly more rare, when White had no reason to complain. She was

charming to all, from the most distinguished to the most socially obscure; she forgot her prejudices, she even forgot to snub her husband's political protégés—to their infinite and undisguised relief—and to her own particular coterie she was the old, charming, inimitable Margaret. As on the occasion of her musical, men predominated, and among those men were all the notables at the capital. Speaking several languages, Margaret had made her house a Mecca for all Europeans; it was an open secret that she espoused the cause of the Russian ambassador against his secret enemy, Lily Osborne, and espoused it with a zeal which caused a whispered sensation in official circles. It was an anxious question what Mrs. White might not dare to do, for it was believed that she would pause at nothing in her determination to defeat Mrs. Osborne. Yet it was never hinted that she concerned herself even remotely with White's devotion to the fair *divorcée*. Her indifference to her husband was a fact too generally accepted to cause even a ripple in the stream.

There had been much secret comment on her changed and haggard looks, but her dryad-like loveliness to-night silenced every whisper, and her gaiety, her ease, her clever, reckless talk proclaimed her the same Margaret they had always known and loved and feared, whose wit was as keen as it was cruel.

Mrs. O'Neal was the first to bid her goodnight. The old lady in her gorgeous panoply of silk and velvet tottered on, like an ancient war-horse answering the bugle call, her white head vibrating as she talked. Still athirst for social power and success, no one was a keener judge of achievements, and she patted Margaret's hand.

"My dear," she whispered, "you're the most charming creature in the world when you choose! I'm old enough to tell you."

"I can never equal you," Margaret retorted lightly, "even when I choose!"

"There! It was worth the risk to get the compliment!" the older woman laughed back; "and your husband,

he looked most distinguished tonight, and those dear children—I saw them in the park! Be good, my child, and you'll be happy!" and she smiled complacently at the axiom as she moved away, a figure of ancient gaiety in tight shoes and costly stays.

Following Mrs. O'Neal's exit, the accepted signal for departure, Margaret's guests began to flow past her in a steady stream, stopping a moment for the individual farewells or congratulations on the pleasure of a brilliant evening. She was standing just inside the ball-room door alone, for White had been summoned unexpectedly to the White House a half-hour previously, his departure adding to the zest of gossip and speculation upon the political situation. Margaret's slim figure in its shimmering dress, her animated face, the peculiar charm of her smile, had never been more observed; she was beautiful. Those who had questioned it, those who had been only half convinced and those who had denied it, were alike overwhelmed with its manifestation. It seemed as if the intangibility of her much disputed charm had vanished and her beauty had taken a visible shape, was crystallized and purified by some fervent emotion which made her spirit illuminate it as the light shines through an alabaster lamp.

One by one they pressed her hand and passed on, feeling the inspiration of her glance. Fox was among the last to approach, and as he did so she stopped him with a slight but imperative gesture. "Stay a moment, William," she murmured, with almost a look of appeal, "I want to speak to you."

Thus admonished he turned back, conscious that by so doing he startled a glance of comprehension in the eyes of Louis Berkman, who was following him, which annoyed him for Margaret's sake. He went over to the fireplace and stood watching the falling embers while the remaining guests made their adieux, then as the rustle and murmur of their departure grew more distant and lost itself in the rooms beyond, he turned and saw her coming down the long room alone and was startled by

the extreme youthfulness and fragility of her appearance, and by the discovery, which came to him with the shock of surprise, that her radiant aspect had slipped from her with her departing guests, that her face was colorless and pinched, though her eyes were still feverishly bright.

"It was good of you to stay," she said, coming to the fire and holding out her hands to the blaze; "how cold it is for the first of April! Sit down, William, and let me send for wine and cigarettes; you look tired."

He raised a deprecating hand. "No more hospitality," he said firmly; "you've done enough; you've lost all your color now."

"Except what I put on with a brush," she said, clasping her hands and letting her long white arms hang down before her as she looked across at him with a keen glance. "I know—you've eaten nothing here since Wicklow broke his word and the rest of it. You won't eat his bread!"

Fox colored. "Should I be here in that case?" he asked.

She shook her head, glancing at the fire. "You can't fool me—I understand."

"Come, I must go," he said firmly; "it is very late and you look wearied to death. You must be, you were absolutely the life of it tonight; you should have heard old de Caillou rhapsodize!"

"Did I do well—did I look my best?" she asked, her lip quivering like a child's, her eyes still on the fire.

"You were your own happy self!" he replied,

She looked up, her slight figure swaying a little as she wrung her hands together; the tears rained down her cheeks. "Billy," she sobbed, "I'm wretched—I—I can't stand it any longer; it will kill me!"

XI

Fox stood aghast at the force, the agony, the abandon of Margaret's confession.

Almost unconsciously his hand met hers, which was stretched out in a mute appeal. He drew her to a chair. "Sit down," he said in an unsteady voice, with an impotent impulse of resistance; "try to calm yourself! This is dreadful!"

She obeyed him mechanically; sinking into the great arm-chair and turning her face against it, she continued to weep, her whole delicate frame shaken and quivering with her emotion.

Fox stood still holding her hand and looking down at her in deep perplexity. He was intuitively aware of the extreme peril and delicacy of the situation for them both, only too certain of her wild and unguarded impulses, and that moment—more supremely than ever—revealed to him the absolute death of his own passion. He tried to quiet her, speaking a few gentle and soothing words, sharply conscious of their inadequacy.

But she scarcely heeded them. After a moment the storm spent itself, and she turned, revealing her white, tear-stained face, which was still beautiful in spite of her weeping. "There comes a time," she said, in a low voice, "when one can bear it no longer—when one would rather die."

"For God's sake, Margaret, don't say such things!" he exclaimed, profoundly moved.

Her lips quivered. "Is it so dreadful to say them?" she retorted passionately; "when you feel them? When they are burned into your flesh? I'm so weary of conventionalities. I tell you that I can't bear it, that I will not bear it any longer!"

As she spoke she rose and stood facing him, her eyes feverishly bright and moist with unshed tears. "You ask too much of me, you have no right to ask it—no one has!" she continued, her lip quivering again; "I cannot be silent—it's killing me!"

Fox colored deeply; he was suddenly forced into an impossible position. "My dear Margaret," he said gravely, "I have no words to meet it, you must know how profoundly I feel it!"

"If I did not—if I were not sure of

you!" she replied a little wildly, "it would kill me sooner. Sometimes I have wanted to die. The doctors say that I have heart trouble—I hope I have! If I believed in prayer I should have prayed to die."

"Margaret! is it as bad as that?" he cried, in a sudden uncontrollable pity; he remembered her as so young, so beautiful, so happy!

Her lips twitched. "As bad as that?" she repeated wildly; "I feel like a trapped squirrel, a rabbit in a snare. I can only shriek because it hurts me—it isn't bad enough yet to kill! I'm caged—oh, William, William, help me to get out!"

"Margaret!" he exclaimed sharply, "don't you know that I can't hear this? This is White's house; I've broken his bread. My God, how dreadful it all is!"

Her hand clenched unconsciously at her side, her white neck rose and fell with her tortured breathing, a horrible doubt had assailed her. Then the light broke over her face; he loved her, that was it, and he was too honorable to speak! She held out both hands. "William, forgive me," she murmured softly, "but what have we gained by silence? What does it all matter to the world? But you must go; perhaps I did wrong to tell you now! Good night—I—I——"

Her lips quivered pitifully. "I have always loved you—don't think me a wicked woman."

"Margaret!" he groaned deeply, terribly touched, yet with a sickening consciousness of his own unresponsive heart.

She smiled faintly, moving away from him toward the stairs. "Oh, you must go, good night!" she repeated, as he paused, half reluctant. "I'm resolved nothing shall change me—in a little while—" She paused and he saw the change in her face, its lighting up and softening, the revelation of its beauty, its subtle charm; saw it with a slow agony of remorse and reluctance; "in a little while," she said, and her smile was wonderful, "I shall be free!"

Fox scarcely knew how he got out of

the house; he left it in a dream and went directly home to his own apartments in an uptown flat. The distance was not great and he scarcely allowed himself to think. His mind was almost confused by the sudden and blinding climax. But as he opened his door, and the dog, Sandy, leaped to meet him, a rush of feeling swept away his passive resistance; he forced himself to turn on the lights more fully and to look about at the familiar objects which met his eyes on all sides, his books, his pictures, his littered writing-table; he even picked up the evening mail, which his clerk had left in its accustomed place, and looked over the pile of letters and pamphlets. But it cost him an effort.

It was very late, but sleep was impossible, and picking up his hat and stick he whistled to Sandy and the two went out into the almost deserted streets. The dog leaped about him with quick, joyous barks, rejoicing in the unexpected outing, and Fox turned his face northward, walking steadily along the brilliantly lighted and strangely quiet avenue which led him through the heart of the northwest section and up on the hill. The tumult of his mind found relief in the physical exercise and the fresh cold air of an early April night.

In spite of that central egotism of his, which was capable of much when unkindly stirred, Fox believed that he possessed strong convictions on the nicer points of honor. If he had drifted often to White's house and been much in Margaret's society it was with no intention of offending against his host. His indolence, his carelessness of what was mere gossip and tittle-tattle, had made him indifferent to the conclusions of others, but he was not unaware of the talk and the surmises of his enemies; he was not unaware that Margaret stood on delicate ground, and that, if she separated from White, there would be a wild burst of excited comment—the comment which costs a woman her good name. Such being the case she had suddenly thrown herself upon his sympathy, she had torn away the thin

veil of conventionality which had saved them, and it was for him to desert her or to defend her when the supreme moment came.

That moment would involve not only his own happiness but—he paused in his thoughts with a shock of feeling which flooded his consciousness with a lucidity, an insight, which appalled him. Was he mistaken, or did it also involve the happiness of the young and innocent girl whom he loved? At the thought of Rose his heart sank; he felt instinctively her abhorrence, her complete lack of understanding of his peculiar situation. To Rose's mind, doubtless, he would appear in the likeness of Mephistopheles!

Good God, what would she think of him? he wondered, but yesterday he had held her hand, looked into her pure, young eyes, almost spoken the final words which would have laid bare his very soul—and now! He seemed to feel the heated, perfumed atmosphere, the pressure of Margaret's fingers on his arm, her wild, sweet smile when she proclaimed her love for him without shame—how vividly he saw it! And her absolute belief in his unchanged love for her! Infatuation, madness, self-deception, it might be all these and more, but she was a woman—and she had flung herself upon his mercy!

As yet that other aspect of the affair, the blighting of his public career which such a scandal might in a measure effect, had not thrust itself upon him; his only thought was for Rose. In that hour he learned how profoundly he loved her; it was part of his nature that the very denial of a gift increased his desire to obtain it.

He walked long and far; it was toward morning when the man and the dog returned, and, when they entered his rooms again, Fox's face was white, his eyes and mouth were haggard, with the look of a man who has passed through a great crisis with much agony of soul. For he had found but one solution, and that sealed his lips.

If his careless preference for her, for her gaiety and her wit, if his thought-

less seeking of her society, if the coupling of his name with hers, had led her to this breaking of her life, then there was no question, there could be no question—he thrust the thought deep down out of sight, but it remained there, coiled like the serpent, ready to strike at the heart of his happiness.

XII

It was ten o'clock in the morning, and Rose was clipping the dead leaves from her flowers in the bow-window of the library, while Judge Temple still read the morning paper in his great high-backed chair; a shaft of sunlight stealing through the open carving touched his scanty white hair and showed the crumpled lines of the blue veins on his temples. He was an old man; he had married late in life and Rose, the youngest born and only survivor of five children, was proportionately dear to him.

"There's some trouble in the Cabinet," he observed, as he turned his paper; "there are hints here about Wicklow White."

Rose looked thoughtful, but continued to arrange her flowers. "Margaret seems very unhappy and very gay, as usual," she remarked softly.

"Too gay, my dear," the judge commented; "old-fashioned fogies like myself get easily shocked. Never go to her dressmaker!"

Rose laughed, her scissors sparkling in the sun. "Why, father, people rave about her and copy her everywhere."

"Let them," said the judge, "let them—but not my daughter! Rose, I'd—I'd whip you!"

"You never did that in your life," she smiled. "I'm almost tempted to try it and see."

"Better not," he retorted grimly, taking off his spectacles and putting them into his pocket; "you'd get a lesson!"

"Poor Margaret!" Rose colored a little; she had caught the glance which Margaret had bestowed on her and Fox.

"Poor fiddlesticks!" replied the

judge, rising and folding his paper; "she's made her bed, child, and she must lie on it; that's the law of life; we reap as we sow."

Rose looked across at him affectionately, but she was wondering what he thought of William Fox; she had never dared to ask. "It's a hard law, father," she said gently; "we all want to be happy."

"You will be—just in proportion to your right to be," he retorted calmly; "it's a matter of the heart anyway, Rose, and not of external matters."

"I suppose so," she replied, with a slight sigh; "but one would like to have externals and internals agree, don't you think?"

The old man laughed pleasantly. "Most of us would," he admitted, "but we never have our way in this world, not in my observation."

As he spoke there was a stir in the hall and a young girl appeared at the drawing-room door.

"It's Gertrude English," Rose said; "don't go yet, father, I'll take her away."

But it appeared that the judge had to go to court, and he went out, patting little Miss English on the shoulder as he passed. "We children grow," he said, laughingly.

Miss English walked over to the window and watched Rose water her plants and turn them religiously to the sun.

"Take off your hat, Gertrude," she said pleasantly; "you look tired. Can't you stay a while?"

Gertrude shook her head. "No," she said firmly; "I've got about a million notes to write for Margaret and the lunch cards to get ready for tomorrow; tonight she dines the President. I'm tired of it; I wish I could make money cracking stones!"

"Poor Gerty!" Rose looked at her with gentle concern; "you're very pale; you look as if you hadn't slept."

"I haven't," said Miss English flatly, "not a wink."

"I hope Margaret doesn't make you work late," Rose murmured, beginning to search again for dead leaves.

"Margaret?" the little secretary sat down and leaned her elbows on her knees, her chin in her hands; "Rose, I'm so sorry for her!"

"She seems gay enough," Rose observed quietly.

"I should say so! I was there very late last night; it was one of her entertainments, and little Ward was sick. I sat with him. You know she treats the children sometimes like playthings, and again—like rats! I was in the nursery watching him and helping the nurse until all the guests went. Then I went downstairs; I wanted to tell Margaret what I'd done, and I went to the ballroom door. She didn't hear me call to her, and I went back upstairs feeling like a sneak. She was there with Mr. Fox and she was crying dreadfully when I saw her."

Rose's scissors clipped sharply and a fresh young twig fell unnoticed to the floor. There was a long pause. Miss English had mechanically taken off her gloves and she was drawing them through her fingers, her face full of honest trouble.

"After a while she came upstairs," she continued, "and came into the room where I was——"

"Gertrude," interrupted Rose suddenly, "ought you to tell me this?"

"Everyone will know soon," said Gertrude drily. "She came over and looked at the child and said she was glad he was better—he was asleep then and the nurse had gone out of the room for some extra milk. Margaret's face was white, and her eyes—I never saw her eyes so wonderful. Suddenly she flung her arms around my neck and began to cry, softly so as not to wake the child. She told me—she's going to get a divorce!"

Rose put aside her scissors and sat down, looking across at Gertrude with a strange expression, but she said nothing.

Miss English sighed, folding her gloves again. "Of course I know how bad it's been," she said; "he's a brute to her sometimes and swears at her before everybody, but—well, Rose, don't you think you'd swear at Margaret if you had to live with her?"

Rose smiled a little, her lips pale. "I don't know, Gerty," she said; "I never did—in my life."

"Didn't you?" Miss English sighed again. "Well," she said, "when you're poor, downright, disgustingly poor, you just have to say 'damn' once in a while; if you didn't you'd kill somebody!"

"But White isn't poor," objected Rose; "he's only vulgar."

"Well, of course there's Lily Osborne." Gertrude shrugged her shoulders. "There won't be any trouble about the divorce in the State of New York or anywhere else, I fancy! I wonder if she means to go to Omaha."

"Do you believe it's really settled?" Rose asked, with a strong feeling of self-abasement; she thought herself a scandalmonger, an unworthy creature, but her heart quaked within her with an unspoken dread, and Miss English's next remarks drove it home.

"Without doubt," she said; "I know it is, and"—she colored a little and looked out of the window at the April sunshine on the garden wall—"Rose, do you believe she'll marry William Fox?" she whispered.

Rose sat regarding her and said nothing. What could she say, poor child? That vividly pictured scene of Margaret weeping and Fox as her comforter was burning deep, and Rose had been brought up by an Old Testament Christian!

"It would be a great pity," Miss English observed, after a long silence; "it would ruin Mr. Fox—people would say *everything*."

Rose colored painfully. "People say very cruel things, Gerty," she said slowly, "and perhaps we're as bad as any, just now."

Gertrude shook her head vigorously, her pleasant round face flushing a little, too. "I don't mean to be," she said; "of course it's a great temptation; we secretaries know *everything*—it's like turning a dress inside out and finding the lining's only paper-cambric with a silk facing; it's all a big sham; we're on the inside and know! But goodness! it would ruin Fox, and I know, Rose, I know she's in love with him."

Rose looked steadily away; she, too, saw the ivy leaves fluttering gently in the sunshine as the light breeze rippled across them.

Miss English sighed. "Well," she said, "I don't care; Margaret's so unhappy, it seems as if she ought to try over again, only there are the children. I forgot, though, Rose, you're very stiff-necked; I suppose you hate divorces?"

Rose shook her head. "I don't believe in marriage after divorce," she said; she was very young and she had rigid standards, like a great many people who have never had to test them in their hearts' blood.

Gertrude English opened her mild blue eyes. "Don't you?" she said. "I didn't, either, until I saw Margaret; then I began to think it was awful to have to live out a mistake." She rose and began to put on her gloves. "Well, there isn't any marrying or giving in marriage in heaven," she remarked, "so I suppose most of us have got to do it all here."

After her guest's departure Rose went back to the library and picking up her scissors put them away, and quite mechanically arranged her father's chair and his foot-rest and looked up the book he would want in the evening. She tried not to let her mind dwell too much on what Miss English had told her, but her lips tightened and her eyes darkened with controlled emotion. She had led, hitherto, a happy, sheltered life, she had never suffered much, and her capacity for suffering was very great. Her character, which was just emerging from the malleable sweetness of girlhood, had begun to feel the impress of her father's stern morality. With Rose right was right, and wrong was wrong; there was no middle course.

Rose had been so happy the day before, the birth of a new and beautiful emotion had so transfigured her young soul, that this sudden and dreadful revelation was in the nature of a thunderbolt from a clear sky; her heart shriveled and shrank within her. Yet to question Fox, to doubt him was, to

her simple, loyal nature, a hideous possibility.

XIII

It fell out—most unseasonably for the Vermilions—that Mrs. O'Neal had planned her annual reception for the same night as their fancy-ball. All the world was sure to go to Mrs. O'Neal's sooner or later, and it broke up the mask-ball at an unusual hour, just before the champagne began to take effect, which was, on the whole, rather a mercy to the Vermilions, though they knew it not and suffered some keen pangs of anger and jealousy. Mrs. O'Neal had, of course, done it on purpose, Cynthia Vermilion said, and perhaps she had! Mrs. O'Neal was a thoroughly worldly old person who would have driven her social chariot over a hundred Vermilions, figuratively speaking, and felt a grim pleasure in doing it.

So she gave her famous annual ball on that beautiful Spring evening when the scent of the lilacs in her garden came in through the open windows.

Those poor Vermilions! They had spent many thousands, and yet people hurried away or came late, only to eat the supper; old Vermilion was a magnificent provider. Of course there were some who never went to the Vermilions' at all, but always to Mrs. O'Neal's; among these were the Temples and old Mrs. Allestree, who made a point to be present at Martha's house, for she and Martha had been schoolmates and were still good friends, although nothing could have been more amusing than the contrast: the one in her old-fashioned dress with her placid face and her kindly smile, and the other, tight-laced, overburdened with satin and jewels, her old head wagging and quivering under its high white pompadour and its jeweled aigrette.

Her rooms were thronged; the dark polished floors, the old mahogany furniture, the glittering mirrors, the bewildering array of candles, tall candles and short candles, huge seven-armed silver candelabra, short, stout silver

candlesticks, the masses of white lilacs, the sweet, heavy odor of them; what a beautiful, dazzling, fanciful scene it was when the lovely women in their rich dresses began to throng every room and corridor, and even lingered laughing and talking on the wide stairs and in the gallery above which commanded the lower hall and the ball-room, where the fluted pillars were festooned with vines and crowned with capitals of roses.

After a while the guests from the fancy-ball began to drift in, a few at first in costume, and then more and more, until the ball-room took on the look of a harlequin show, and there was much gay laughter and criticism of each new arrival from those who had disdained the Vermilion ball or who had never been asked.

Mrs. Osborne came, beautiful and striking, dressed as an Eastern sorceress, and almost at once she had a circle around her in the corner of the conservatory, and was telling fortunes and interpreting dreams with all the arts of a charlatan and the charm of a lovely woman. She told fortunes well; it is an alluring art, it shows pretty hands and delicate wrists, and the downward sweep of soft eyelashes, the arch of a white brow, besides that swift glance upward from bewildering lovely eyes—

Margaret White came from the fancy-ball, where it had been her whim to appear as Ophelia. Perhaps her conscience had pinched her for her treatment of Mrs. Vermilion in Allestree's studio, or it had merely pleased her to go. It was often impossible to find the key to her conduct. At any rate she had gone, and she came late to Mrs. O'Neal's, where she was to meet her husband, for he had refused to go in costume to the Vermilions'. He was a man of too heavy common sense to trick himself out in fancy dress, and on that one point he knew his own limitations; he had never been able to play a part to his own satisfaction, and he had too high an opinion of Wicklow White to belittle him with a failure. So it happened that he had already had his fortune told by the enchantress in the conservatory when

a ripple of excitement from the ball-room reached him.

The crowd parted to let Margaret pass through it. She wore a flowing, soft, white gown, thin, clinging, revealing her neck and arms and the long slim lines of her figure; her hair, which was beautiful and hanging, trimmed with flowers, while her arms were full of them.

There was a silence; every eye was on her, and there was an instantaneous recognition of her remarkable fitness for the part; the delicate, subtle beauty of her face, her brilliant eyes, with the dusky shadows below them, the longing, the pain, the uninterpreted feeling of her expression, her wild hair, her slim, graceful figure, the appealing beauty of her slender white hands as she held them out, offering rosemary and rue and daisies; was she really an actress born or—the very nymph herself? That mystic atmosphere of tragedy which sometimes seemed to pervade her being had at last found an expression at once visible and beautiful.

It was her whim to play the part out, and people watched her, fascinated; those who did not approve of her, those who disliked her, as well as those who fell under her spell, watched her with undisguised eagerness. She drew all eyes and knew it. She looked up and saw her husband standing in the door of the conservatory; their eyes met with a challenge: they had quarreled woefully over her coming in this dress, and it only needed the sight of him to kindle her wilful daring, her abominable obstinacy. Someone called her by name and spoke to her, but, unheeding, she began to sing Ophelia's song, throwing flowers as she walked slowly, very slowly down the crowded room.

There was a little breathless applause, but she met it with a vacant look, coming on, tossing a rose here, a lily there, to be caught by some ready hand.

Mrs. Wingfield, unhappily, stood in her path. She had been watching her approach with an expression which needed no explanation, but she could

not be content with silent disapproval; she rushed upon her fate. "Why, how do you do, Mrs. White," she said in her audible voice; "I really didn't know it was you; I thought it must be some actress!"

Margaret looked at her blankly, then she put her head on one side. "'Well, God 'ild you!'" she exclaimed, "'they say the owl was a baker's daughter.'"

Mrs. Wingfield turned painfully scarlet. There was a titter, an audible and wavering titter around her. Alack, there were only too many who remembered, with the memory of society, that her father had dealt in loaves and fishes!

But Margaret had passed on; she handed a flower to Fox as she passed, rosemary for remembrance; she gave a rose to Rose Temple, and to the judge a sprig of rue with a little malicious smile.

"Call it herb of grace o' Sundays!" she said lightly, and the judge laughed good-humoredly with the others, for he knew that his stiff, old-fashioned manners and customs were often meat for jests.

After all, it was not so bad; people were obviously entertained. White began to draw a breath of relief; he tried to signal to her to stop. But Margaret was not done; instead, the very spirit of defiance seemed to possess her. She suddenly knelt in the centre of the room and began to make a wreath of flowers, singing Ophelia's lament, her sweet, high voice carrying far in the great rooms. The throng of gaily dressed women drew farther away, the circle widened, necks were craned, those behind stood on tiptoe.

It was too much for Wicklow White; he could endure no more. He walked abruptly across the space. "Margaret," he said in a low peremptory voice, "this is too much; we must go home!"

She looked up and shook back her soft, wild hair as she tossed a flower at him.

"'For bonny, sweet Robin is all my joy!'" she sang maliciously.

He crimsoned and bit his lip. Again

someone applauded; there was a slight murmur of talk.

Margaret rose abruptly from her knees and began to laugh, herself again, gay, debonair, indifferent. "What a fool I can be to entertain you!" she said, her delicate face bright as a child's.

People gathered about her at once. She was congratulated, praised, but in the corners others disapproved and thought her a little mad. Mrs. Osborne glanced meaningly at her nearest friend and tapped her forehead, and Mrs. Wingfield laughed furiously.

"What a delightful side-show!" she said; "they say White will lose his place—no wonder!"

The throng had closed up again, the gay murmur of talk rose; the musicians were just beginning to play a waltz and the ball-room was filling with dancers.

Margaret, laughing and talking, stood in the door. Fox, looking across at her, experienced a feeling of deep amazement. What an actress a woman can be! It seemed to him that he had dreamed that scene in White's house, that it was impossible, untrue, a phantasm of his troubled brain. Then, as he watched her, pondering on a woman's unfathomable moods, he saw a sudden gray whiteness spread over her face like a veil, her eyelids quivered, her lips parted and she swayed.

In an instant he had reached her and caught her as she fell. Judge Temple helped him hush the stir it made, and he carried her quietly and swiftly downstairs to a reception-room below where he could get help at once.

XIV

ROSE slept but little that night; she tossed instead, trying to still her heart. She had seen Fox but a moment in the throng, but that moment had been enough for her to feel the subtle change in their relations. Her perceptions were delicate, far-reaching, exquisitely sensitive. He was not himself; his

troubled eye met hers with a confession of sorrow which she could not interpret. Standing outside of his consciousness, unaware of the struggle in his soul, she only saw estrangement, awkwardness, a mute appeal, which seemed to her incapable of explanation unless he loved Margaret and had been trifling with her. The thought made Rose sit up in bed with flaming cheeks.

If Fox loved Margaret, if he meant to marry White's wife when she was free—Rose shuddered; she had learned her father's views on divorce and remarriage by heart. At least he should not pity her!

After a while she lay down again and hid her burning face on her pillow, for it was wet with tears. She would not cry out, she would not flinch, but it hurt.

In the morning she bathed her eyes again and again in cold water, dressed and went down to breakfast. The judge was reading his morning paper and they were both rather taciturn. The old man had troubles of his own just then which Rose knew nothing about. He had invested some money unwisely and had heavily endorsed the notes of a friend, a man he had trusted, but lately a doubt began to thrust itself into his abstracted mind. Besides his salary as judge he had but a slender fortune, and if that were really involved and he should die—he looked up over his paper at Rose with anxious, affectionate eyes. She was looking down at her cup of coffee and did not perceive his glance, but he saw again the trouble in her face and thought her eyes looked as if she had been weeping; there was a droop, too, to her lips which was unnatural. It set him thinking, and a cloud settled on his usually serene brow.

After a while he got up and went into his library to finish his paper before he went out, and he was still there when Rose came in and began to tend her plants. He noticed that she was very quiet and that she took less pains than usual. He laid down his paper. "Rose, has Allestree finished your picture yet?" he asked.

"Yes, I think so," she replied, blushing suddenly; "but he keeps on fussing over it. Perhaps we should send for it."

"I want to pay for it; I'll send him a cheque today," the judge said, opening a drawer and looking absently for his cheque-book; "it may not be convenient later."

Rose set down her pitcher and stood twisting a broken leaf in her fingers. "He'll never take anything for it, father."

The judge looked over his spectacles. "We can't take such a present," he remarked. "I'm afraid you've let Robert fall in love with you, Rose."

She gave him a quick, pained glance. "I—I hope not!" she said softly.

The old man smiled. "He's a good boy, Rose; I shouldn't disapprove except that I can't spare you—I'm such a selfish old brute."

"And I can't leave you!" she retorted, with a queer little laugh, tears in her voice; "but I know Robert won't take any money for it. I—I shouldn't dare offer it."

"You needn't, but I shall," replied her father calmly. "If he tells me he's in love with you I shall not be surprised; no one will be any the worse for it, Rose."

"I should be very sorry," she said simply.

The old man gave her a keen glance and pursed his lips as he wrote the cheque.

"He'll never take it," she repeated, taking up her pitcher again.

"Well, I'm not anxious to give him you instead!" said the judge.

Rose laughed a little in spite of herself. "You need not!" she replied.

Her father signed the cheque. "Rose," he said, in an absent voice, "what did Gerty English say about Margaret's divorce?"

Rose bent assiduously to her task. "Not much," she answered quietly; "just that it was settled; she meant to get one, she's very unhappy."

"Of course she means to marry again; that's what they do these days," the judge said in a tone of fine irony; "one

husband isn't enough, or one wife. Solomon ought to get here! Of course she'll marry Fox."

Rose was silent; through the open window she could see the buds on the Persian lilac, but she shivered.

"What I should like to know," said the judge shrewdly, "is—*does Fox want to marry her?*"

Rose put her hand to her throat with a helplessly futile gesture. "They say he was in love with her long ago, father."

The old man smiled. "My dear child," he remarked, "women always remember that Jacob served seven years! But Fox is a genius, an unusual man and probably as fickle as the wind. However, he'll have to reap as he has sown; doubtless he has dangled at Margaret's elbow; it's been the fashion. Well, well, it will very likely thwart his career, and, if so, he'll deserve it, but I hoped great things of him, though I've feared him a little, too; genius is like fire—it burns where it touches."

He rose and put aside his papers. "I've written to Robert and enclosed the cheque," he said; "he'll get it tomorrow."

"Then I'll go there today," said Rose. "I shouldn't dare tomorrow; he'll be furious."

"Not a bit of it; he has too much sense," retorted the judge. "Besides, he can't have my girl yet!"

"Nor ever!" said Rose, smiling as her father bent suddenly and kissed her.

"Ever is a long word," he replied and laughed gently; in his heart he believed that Allestree would make her happy.

An hour later Rose joined Mrs. Allestree on the way to the studio. The old lady was out walking in the Spring sunshine, her fine aged face mapped close with delicate wrinkles and little puckers and her keen old eyes bright and alert in spite of the weight of years.

She took Rose's proffered arm with a smile. "I forgot my cane," she said. "I always forget that I'm more than twenty-four until I try to go upstairs. I tell Robert that I can't climb up to

his studio much longer; he'll have to have an elevator. I'm going now to see your picture. He means to send it to your father tomorrow; it's been hard to part with it!"

Rose colored deeply, much to her own chagrin.

"Father is anxious to have it," she said; "he spoke about it this morning."

"Wants to pay for it, I presume," the old woman retorted shrewdly. "I've always said that Stephen Temple would offer to pay for his halo! Tell him not to try to pay Robert, Rose; it would hurt."

Rose looked at her helplessly. "He's written about it," she said reluctantly. "I told him, but he would do it."

Mrs. Allestree's sensitive face colored almost as vividly as the girl's and she stopped, her hand on Rose's arm, and looked down thoughtfully. "It's in your father's writing, of course?" she said at last.

"Yes, he wrote this morning and posted it himself."

The old woman drew a long breath. "I'm going to commit a felony, Rose," she said. "I'm going to get that letter; Robert's mail comes to the house, and I see it first. I shall send the cheque back to your father myself."

"I'm afraid he'll be angry," said Rose thoughtfully. "I didn't know what to do; I was sure Robert didn't want to—to be paid for it."

"Paid for it!" Mrs. Allestree shook her head sadly; "my dear child, it has been a labor of love. You couldn't ask Robert to take money for it."

Rose was silent; she felt herself a mere puppet in Mrs. Allestree's hands, the old woman was as shrewd and as skilful as the most worldly matchmaker in her gentle and affectionate way; besides, she adored her son and, like most mothers, she was willing to offer up any sacrifice which seemed worthy for immolation. There was a moment of embarrassment on Rose's part, and she was glad to see the Wicklow White motor-car coming swiftly toward them. At the sight of the liveries Mrs. Allestree turned quickly and caught an indis-

tinct view of a woman's figure, a white chiffon hat and a feather boa.

"Why, it's Margaret!" she exclaimed, half stopping to look back.

"No; it's Mrs. Osborne," Rose said quietly; "she's taken off her half mourning."

Mrs. Allestree's face changed sharply. "In White's motor-car?" The old woman glanced after the vanishing juggernaut with an eloquent expression. "Society is curious nowadays! White has behaved outrageously. I suppose you've heard of the divorce project?"

Rose nodded. "Gerty told me."

"So she did me," said Mrs. Allestree grimly; "in strict confidence, of course!"

They looked at each other and laughed helplessly.

"Poor Gerty, she tells everything!" said Rose; "but she's so good-hearted."

"My dear child," remarked Mrs. Allestree, "the longer you live the more convinced you'll be that good-hearted people and fools are blood relations. Of course, White has behaved dreadfully; we all know it—but the Lord knows Margaret has provoked him beyond endurance many a time! I shall speak to her about the children. Robert says I sha'n't; he'll have me locked up first, that it's none of my business. A pretty way to speak to his old mother! I can't help it; I shall ask her to remember her poor little children."

"I'm afraid they're an awful burden to her, anyway," rejoined Rose soberly.

"Oh, I'll admit that it's an affliction, a downright scourging of the Almighty's to have them look so much like old Mrs. White! But she's got to consider them; she brought them into the world, poor, little, homely souls! Estelle always reminds me of a little pink-eyed rabbit! As for the divorce, it will be a hideous scandal!" and the old lady's bright eyes glanced quickly at Rose. She was wondering if she had heard that Mrs. Wingfield said that Fox was the cause of it. It was cruel, it couldn't possibly be true, but it was sure to gain credence and Mrs. Wingfield knew it!

William Fox was her own nephew, she was proud of him and she loved him, but she was torn between her desire to see her son happy and to shield her nephew. Her thin old lips opened once to speak and closed again quickly; no, she dared not! What was in the child's heart? Rose was such a child and her father brought her up so unlike other girls, she was sure to take the man's view, the hard, flat, ethical view of Stephen Temple, and Mrs. Allestree felt, with some secret amusement, that she would as soon try to argue with the devil as with the judge, when once his feet were planted in the straight and narrow path, the old, blue Presbyterian path, as the old woman called it, with her whimsical smile.

Ah, if Rose had only loved Robert as any well-regulated young woman would! But Robert's mother had a few self-deceptions on that point; she had eyes and she had used them.

Meanwhile they walked up the hill to the studio. On the right the terraced wall of the corner garden was half hidden by the fresh green sprays of the ivy which mantled it, and a great purple lilac in full bloom nodded above it, its fragrance filling the air. The row of old brick houses opposite had assumed a more genial aspect, here and there a striped awning broke the dull red of their monotonous fronts, and the white pillars of a rejuvenated portico shone in the sunshine. A little girl was buckling her roller-skates on the curb in front of Daddy Lerwick's curiosity-shop.

Mrs. Allestree stopped and halted Rose before the glass show-windows, peering in at the odds and ends with a smiling face. "Rose," she said amusedly, "what shall I give you? A camel's-hair shawl or a six-shooter?"

"I couldn't buy anything here," the girl replied quickly; "I suppose I'm foolish, but the thought—oh, poor things, how it must have hurt to sell them, one after another, for a trifle, too!"

The old woman laughed softly. "You're your father's daughter, Rose," she said. "I'm ashamed, but I'm going

to buy that old mirror. Go upstairs and send Robert down with his purse. I don't want you about; you make me uncomfortable!"

"I suppose I am very silly," Rose admitted reluctantly, "but I can't help it."

"My dear, you're perfectly right, I haven't a doubt about it," laughed Mrs. Allestree gently; "you haven't a sense of humor, that's all, child, and if I were a man I'd just as soon marry an animated conscience; you'll either reform your husband or you'll be the death of him! Now, go and send Robert, for I'm an old sinner and I want that mirror!"

Rose went upstairs, laughing in spite of herself. But as she approached the studio she caught her breath; she heard voices; could Fox be there? She hesitated and stood still, agitated by the thought, then, unwilling to listen even to assure herself, she parted the portières and called to Allestree. As she did so she came face to face with Mrs. Osborne. This, then, was her destination when she had passed in the motor-car, Rose thought swiftly, but it was too late now to retreat; she gave Robert his mother's message.

"I'll go," he said, "if you'll excuse me a moment, and bring mother up; if I don't, she'll get the whole shop on credit."

"Oh, go at once!" exclaimed Mrs. Osborne, laughing; "that would be worse and more expensive than a bridge tournament."

Rose bit her lip; the reference was pointed and she caught Robert's eye full of doubt. "Go," she said hastily, "and bring your mother upstairs; she didn't want me there to see her bargain."

"I sha'n't be a moment," he exclaimed, and they heard him running downstairs.

Left alone with Mrs. Osborne, Rose moved to the window and looked out. She heard the rustle of the other woman's silken linings as she moved restlessly about the studio, and after a moment she came over to the window, though Rose's very attitude was repellent.

"How full the lilacs are," she observed, and the girl noticed the rich softness of her tone. "I like them; we had lilacs about the old house at home."

"They grow wonderfully in New England, I know. I've often seen them like trees," Rose rejoined a little stiffly.

"But I'm not from New England," laughed Lily Osborne. "I've often wondered what mother thought of it."

"She wasn't a New Englander, then?" Rose turned and looked at her, more interested than usual.

Mrs. Osborne shrugged her shoulders with much expression. "She was from New Orleans, a French Creole. She married a Frenchman; I was born in Paris; it was my husband who took me to New Hampshire first; my mother lived there five years with some relatives. But she never spoke of it!" she added, laughing.

"You are only half an American, then," Rose remarked, surprised.

Mrs. Osborne looked at her critically through her long eyelashes. "I'm a woman," she said; "that's all we ever are, my dear, and it's enough."

"More than enough sometimes," Rose replied quietly.

Lily Osborne laughed again, stooping a little to lean both hands on the window-sill as she looked out. At the touch of her flowing draperies Rose drew back with instinctive repugnance. They were naturally antagonistic, and the touch of her dress, the sound of her voice, were distasteful.

The older woman noticed the movement instantly, her perceptions were of the keenest. She looked upon the girl as rather dull, if beautiful, and as an unworthy adversary, yet she resented her manner. Her cheek reddened and she bit her lip as she stared down into the street with unseeing eyes. She turned and saw Rose looking at a rough sketch of Fox. Allestree had done it in a few moments when Fox was talking and unconscious that he was a model. The result was remarkable; the artist had caught his happiest expression and the fine upward sweep of

the brow, the noble pose of the head. Rose saw it for the first time and she had forgotten Lily Osborne. She was looking at it with an absorbed eye, her cheek pale.

The other woman read her as easily as an open page; she moved over to her side and raised her lorgnon. "Excellent," she commented; "a splendid head, I always said so! You have heard of the great divorce—Mrs. White from the secretary?"

Rose did not reply; she glanced anxiously toward the door. They both heard steps on the stairs and Mrs. Allestree's voice panting at every step. "Robert, I don't care! Of course the man cheats; they all do; but it's a beauty and only seventy-five dollars!"

Lily Osborne continued: "Of course Fox will have to marry her—that's the code, I believe! Thank heaven, when I got my divorce I didn't have to marry to save myself! It's such a pity on his account, with his career, but the secretary would be a fool not to divorce her, she——"

Rose turned coldly. "Pardon me," she said, with white lips, "I don't care to listen to scandal," and she walked away to meet Mrs. Allestree, her head up, but her heart sinking within her. The sheer misery that swept in upon her being, chilling its natural, happy calm, transforming all the cheerful amenities of life, appalled her.

XV

Two days later Mrs. Allestree rang the bell at Margaret's door with a sudden sensation of panic. She had felt it her duty to go, in spite of Robert's protests, for the morning newspaper had printed a scarcely veiled account of the scandal in the Cabinet. White, it appeared, had openly quarreled with his wife and abruptly left her the day before, publishing his private affairs by going to a large hotel which was crowded with fashionable guests. Society caught its breath and waited—with the relish that it usually waits—for a *cause célèbre*.

"It's a cowardly thing to do, Robert," Mrs. Allestree declared hotly; "no man should expose a woman to such a scandal. I shall go to see Margaret today; it's my duty!"

"Oh, Lord, mother!" groaned Allestree, "can't you let it alone? What in the world can you do?"

"Do? Robert!" the old lady's bright eyes flashed, "I'm ashamed of you! Do you think I'll let people imagine that I believe my own nephew is a scamp? Not a bit of it! And Margaret—the child's heart-broken, that's all; I'll never believe a word against her! Of course he'll marry that Osborne woman."

"Mother, mother! You know what Gerty told us? Margaret herself is going to get the divorce; she's forced the situation."

"Gerty's a fool!" said his mother promptly and unreservedly.

Then she put on her bonnet and went, but as she approached the imposing house with its great porte-cochère and its long row of fluted white pillars, its upper balcony and its conservatory, its flagrant and ostentatious wealth, her heart sank drearily. Experience had taught her that the very wealthy have their own way; moreover, what could she say? What had she a right to say? But she was a courageous old woman and strong in her convictions; she rang the bell. A tardy but irreproachable footman opened the door and regarded her with a carefully impersonal stare.

"Wonders who the old party is in an 1830 bonnet!" thought Mrs. Allestree amusedly, but she inquired for Margaret and was admitted after an instant of hesitation which involved the inspection of her card.

She waited a long while, it seemed to her, in the dim drawing-room, and looked about her at its luxuries and the long vista of the ball-room beyond with a new interest. "Splendid misery," she thought, and sighed.

After a while a French maid came down and asked Mrs. Allestree to come upstairs. Margaret, it appeared, was only half recovered from her attack at Mrs. O'Neal's.

She was lying on a lounge by the open window of her bedroom when the old woman entered, and she greeted her with a languid smile. Her white morning gown made her look paler than usual, but she was the picture of indifference and she had been viewing a new hat of a very pronounced size and startling effect.

She held out a hand to Mrs. Allestree, with an odd little laugh. "Oh, how do you do?" she said calmly; "you know Wicklow has gone off and left me! I'm ordering a new hat to keep up my spirits."

Mrs. Allestree sat down weakly in the nearest chair. "Margaret!" she protested faintly.

Margaret looked at her from under her drooping lashes. "Did you expect to find me in tears?" she asked coolly.

Her visitor colored deeply; after all, Robert had been right, she had no justification, her well-meant sympathy was fruitless, her coming an intrusion. "I suppose I shouldn't have come here at all," she admitted reluctantly, her fine old hands trembling a little in her lap, "but I came to tell you that I had always loved you, Margaret."

The younger woman looked at her strangely, her face changing rapidly from defiance to a shamed affection, the unlooked-for tenderness touched her sore heart; her stormy nature had been passing through one of its eclipses, when the light itself seemed to go out and leave her groping blindly for relief, for hope, for an escape from the intolerable situation which her own folly and infatuation had created, and which kept closing in upon her like the narrowing walls of the inquisition dungeon. "I think it lovely of you to say it," she murmured, a little break in her voice, her lip quivering as she averted her face.

Mrs. Allestree's eyes softened; she gave a hasty glance about her, partly to assure herself that they were alone, and partly because she was just realizing the fanciful splendor of Margaret's surroundings. The room was white

and gold and every article on her toilet-table was gold mounted, every detail suggesting the height of luxurious sybaritism. "Margaret," she began gently, "it is never too late, can't I do something to—to bridge it over?"

Margaret's lips stiffened, her momentary emotion passing at the mere suggestion of a continuance in the old intolerable relation. She shook her head impatiently. "I wouldn't bridge it over if I could!" she exclaimed with passion.

But the old lady, foreseeing troubles which would involve those near and dear to her, could not give up so easily.

"My dear child, it's dreadful! The woman always suffers—and your husband's high position, the publicity of it!"

Margaret shrugged her shoulders. "I can't help that!" she said scornfully; "I've borne it long enough. Haven't I a right to be happy? A nursemaid might expect that, a cook! Why shouldn't I have a little happiness in my life?"

"You have so much!" Mrs. Allestree looked about her, "everything wealth can purchase—and the children! God has been good to you; hasn't He a right to chasten you a little?"

Her glance at the material comforts of the room, her evident consideration of the wealth, the worldly as well as the religious side of the question, irritated Margaret anew, for she had no tolerance for compromise, she had bought all these things at too dear a cost, and knew it in the overwhelming bitterness of her soul.

"What in the world do I care for all this if I haven't happiness?" she demanded bitterly, "and I've never had it, never for a moment! Besides, it's all nonsense to argue about it; it's over and done with, thank God! We quarreled irrevocably; Wicklow wouldn't forgive me if I'd forgive him—and I never will!"

"Oh, Margaret, Margaret!" Mrs. Allestree shook her head; "there are your children, you must think of them, you're bound to, my heart aches for them!"

"Well, it needn't! Mrs. White will

bring them up beautifully, she adores them, I don't!" Margaret's thin cheeks were burning and her eyes glowed dangerously; the children had been held over her head too often, she was in no mood to hear of them again.

"That's the most wicked thing you've said!" exclaimed her visitor with indignation; "you've lost your mind, Margaret; you can't expect happiness feeling as you do! There, I know you'll despise me, but I'm an old woman, and I had to speak my mind!"

Margaret raised herself on her elbow and pointed an accusing finger. "Speak it," she exclaimed with bitterness, "but—were you ever in my place? Were you ever married to a man like my husband, a man who was openly unfaithful to you—who was the talk and the jest of the town because of another woman? Were you ever made to feel that you were bought, a mere chattel?"

Mrs. Allestree looked at her in silence, her fine old face grew pale, her lips trembled. Margaret sank down again, her hand on her heart.

"You never were!" she said scornfully.

Mrs. Allestree wiped away her tears. "I meant well," she said, "but despise me, Margaret, I deserve it!"

"I don't despise you, I think you a dear," Margaret retorted, softening; "only you do not in the least understand. "It's all right for you to be so good and so pious, but I can't be!"

"You've made me a wretched old hypocrite!" said Mrs. Allestree. "Oh, Margaret, you can be just what you want to be, you are so clever, so beautiful, so charming!"

Margaret shrugged her shoulders. "I'm a miserable sinner, dear heart, it's no use to try to reform me."

"You are wilful! Oh, child, it's for you I speak, you'll regret it!" She bent forward and patted the limp white hand that hung over the side of the lounge. From the bottom of her heart she wished she knew how to reach her, but she had been curiously defeated.

Margaret bit her lip, there was a little spot of color in each cheek, her heavy

eyes shone with feverish defiance. "I wish I were like you, I wish I had lived your life, I should like to be good if I could!" she said slowly, without mockery.

Mrs. Allestree turned red. "Don't, Margaret! I'm really not the Pharisee or the Levite, only I wanted to help you!"

"I mean just what I said," Margaret retorted quietly; "but I can't be religious, I—I must be loved, I must be happy; I should die just being good!"

The old lady stooped and kissed her impetuously. "You're ill, child, and weak; wouldn't it do any good if I—I should go to see Mr. White?"

"And bring him back here?" Margaret shuddered. "My dear friend, I'm going to get out of here tomorrow; I shall never come into this house again!"

Mrs. Allestree stood up, shocked. "Where will you go?" she asked helplessly.

"To Omaha. Of course I could get a divorce anywhere; everyone knows that!"

"And the children?"

"I sent them over to Wicklow's mother this morning; she was nearly in spasms for fear I'd want the custody!"

Mrs. Allestree stood looking at her a moment in speechless amazement; then she surrendered. "Good-bye, Margaret," she said quietly; "I'm a useless old foggy and busybody; I see it, but I couldn't help coming; I remember you running about in short skirts with your hair in a pigtail! Heaven knows I wish you were a child still and as happy as you were then!"

Margaret sighed. "I wish I were!" she said.

Mrs. Allestree tightened her bonnet ribbons under her chin with shaking fingers, her heart swelling with anger and disgust. A woman, the mother of children, to behave like this! It was monstrous? Behave like it herself? Never! Her stern lips parted once to utter a word of rebuke, but her courage failed her; she remembered Robert's remonstrances. After all

what right had she to speak? "I wish you were indeed!" she repeated stinily.

Her tone, something in her offended gesture, reached Margaret's heart. She rose, rose with a visible effort, and went to her with an unsteady step, throwing her arms around her neck, disarranging the astonished old woman's bonnet as she did it. "Love me!" she sobbed, with the abandon of a child who has been punished; "love me—I'm starving to be loved, to be taken care of; oh, don't you understand? I want to be happy!"

There was a moment of suspended indignation, of doubt, then the old arms clasped her; if she could but save this brand from the burning! "Poor child!" she murmured, "you poor, unhappy, misguided child! Let me be the peacemaker."

It was a woeful mistake; Margaret raised her head with a wild little laugh, pushing her away again almost with force. "Oh, you'll never understand me!" she cried, with a finality which was a sharp shock to her listener, "never! You can never change me—I'd sell my soul to be free!

XVI

Fox had not seen Rose alone since that night now some weeks distant when, after a bitter struggle with himself, he had definitely accepted the inexorable fact of Margaret's demand upon him. To injure a woman, however unwittingly, seemed to him contemptible, even when he secretly raged against the injustice of her claims and repudiated them in his heart with something akin to savage anger. It had been a bitter experience, a shock to his egotism, to his infatuated belief in himself, that belief which comes sometimes to genius with the force of absolute conviction.

The adjournment of Congress had left him more at liberty than usual and he was anxious to leave the city, yet to do so would be interpreted as flight. He had purposely absented himself from White's house, and Margaret,

understanding his mood, had refrained from communicating with him, but he was instinctively aware that she was unshaken in her resolution, and the news of the open rupture came to him almost as a relief; it was over, and it was useless to indulge in vague hopes and futile thoughts of escape from his responsibility; he must meet the fate that his folly and selfishness had invited, and with it the wreck of his own happiness! And he was a strong-willed, selfish man; it was well-nigh impossible to yield to such a course, to give up, to let Rose go just when it seemed most possible to win her. As for Margaret, the manner in which he thought of her, the wretched obstinacy with which her fate entangled his, argued ill indeed for her future hope of happiness if he married her. If he yielded that reluctant assent to the situation, if he accepted the claim she made upon him, it might be a bare and cruel fate for both. He was himself unaware of the impossibility of concealment, that his final indifference would be more cruel, more deadly than present repudiation. He thought, instead, of himself, of the wreck of a dream which had filled his soul with the beautiful and tender amenities of love and loyalty and protection; he forgot that a man can hide his heart as little as the leopard can change his spots, and that a woman can suffer more in its revelation than she would from physical brutality.

All this while the thought of Rose came to him with cruel regret. There were hours, between daylight and dawn, when he walked the floor battling with his own soul, battling with the irresistible desire to go to her, to tell her that he loved her, no matter what happened; let the universe crumble, let her despise him for his weakness, if she would, but to tell her the truth! It seemed to him supremely worth the cost.

It was late in the afternoon of one of those perfect Spring days when the cherry-trees are white with bloom behind the garden walls and all the parks are full of robins. Fox had left his

work in his vacant committee-room at the Capitol, and crossing the city, was walking westward with no companion but Sandy. The desire to see Rose had crystallized in his heart even while he struggled against it, and he turned almost unconsciously in the direction of her home. He had heard that very morning of the rumors, now numerous and substantial, of Judge Temple's financial losses; one man had told him that the judge was on the brink of ruin, and the thought of distress and sorrow coming to her stung Fox with renewed misery. As he came in sight of the modest old house with its ivy-mantled wall and its white door, with the half-moon of triangular panes above it, and its fluted white pilasters on either side, he looked up over it with the feeling of a man who had shut the gate of paradise in his own face. He had intended to pass it, crossing on the street below, but at the corner Sandy stopped and pricked his ears and then dashed forward with a joyous bark of greeting, and his master knew that he was betrayed.

Rose had just mounted her horse at her own door and was dismissing the negro who had held the reins. The sun shone full in her face and made a nimbus of her soft bright hair, while her slim figure in the saddle looked more youthful than ever. She had recognized Sandy and greeted him with a kindly word as he leaped at her stirrup, and seeing his master behind him she held in her restless horse and waited quietly, only a slight deepening of the color in her cheeks indicating the tumult in her heart.

"It's too perfect a day to be indoors," she said with a lightness of tone which shocked her own ears. "I'm going down by the speedway to see the river and that soft haze which I know is lying over on the Virginia shore; in the afternoon sun it looks like a mirage."

"I don't think I should enjoy the sight," Fox said; "life has been too much of a mirage to me lately."

She looked down at him, the sun illuminating her beautiful eyes.

"Life?" she repeated with sudden girlish enthusiasm; "isn't it what we make it? We owe it to ourselves—that moral responsibility."

He laughed with bitterness. "Moral responsibility!" he repeated with sudden fury, "what cant it is! No living man can control his life where it touches another's."

She shrank instinctively, with a sharp moral recoil, from his impassioned words, coloring deeply. Her hands trembled as she held the bridle, and even that slight motion made her horse swerve, eager to be off. Intuition, swift and unerring, interpreted his words and his sudden stress of feeling. "Pardon me," she said simply, "I did not mean to set myself up as a judge. I suppose I'm very ignorant of such matters and—I would rather be so," she added with gentle dignity.

He looked at her, deeply touched. "My God, Rose," he murmured, "leave me; if you stay a moment longer I must speak, and you will never forgive me!"

Her lip trembled like a child's, but her clear eyes were full of a grave condemnation; yet she was deeply moved; he had never called her by her name before, and the sound of it upon his lips, the very way in which it was uttered, voiced his heart; she could not close her ears to it, no matter how much she struggled with herself, and she did struggle, determined to hide her own pang of anguished regret. For a moment neither spoke, then she leaned slightly from her saddle and held out her hand. "Let us part friends," she said in a voice of restraint.

He did not take her hand; he groaned. "I cannot!" he exclaimed with renewed bitterness; "do not offer a sop to a starving man!"

Her horse plunged and she grasped the bridle again with both hands. Her face changed so completely that it seemed to him a strange face. He could not read it, but he believed that, in her heart, she condemned him, that he appeared to her in the guise of Mephistopheles himself. Yet, as she turned and looked back at him, there

was an expression in her eyes at once inscrutable and beautiful. he could never be sure how far it confessed her heart. Had she loved him? It was impossible to know, and he stood mute, watching her slight figure outlined against the sun as she galloped down the long, quiet street.

Rose had turned her horse's head through less frequented streets toward the White Lot, and galloping through the bridle paths around the ellipse she turned and crossing the street rode down to the speedway, the sun shining athwart her path and the river lying before her a sheet of silver.

She checked her horse and sat looking across the river, shading her eyes with her hand. The sight of Fox, the sound of his voice, had unnerved her. She had thought herself strong enough to dismiss him from her mind, to live down that dream, that idle, futile dream, but she found that she had not counted the cost, that she had suffered a serious hurt. Already Rose's inner mind began to question her own judgment. She knew nothing of the circumstances; had she a right to condemn him? Secretly she blamed Margaret, what woman does not blame the other woman a little?

But Rose knew Margaret, knew her charm, her subtlety, her daring, and she battled with herself, trying to beat down her secret condemnation of the woman only. She was a stern little moralist, and she tried to be just; Fox must be to blame also, for was not Margaret married? The enormity of his offense could not be excused, besides, as she reflected, with a gnawing pain at her heart, of what avail to argue? If the divorce was granted—and it would be, beyond a doubt—Fox would marry Margaret.

Her lips tightened, her hands grasped the bridle again, and she turned her horse's head and rode slowly back, the scent of flowers, of sweet new grass, of the fresh-turned earth came to her, and the sweet treble note of a song-sparrow; but the world would never be quite the same again she had met life face to face and learned one of its profound

lessons. The young purity of her soul refused to accept it as a common lot, and it was characteristic of the sweetness of her temperament that, however she suffered, she did not blame Fox for having deliberately won her love, but she shrank, with almost physical repugnance, from the thought of him as the lover of a married woman. The judge's lessons had gone even deeper than he knew.

XVII

THAT very day Judge Temple violated his usual custom and did not come home promptly after court adjourned. The hour came and passed and he had not appeared.

Rose was waiting for him in the library and she began to glance uneasily at the clock. His habits were as fixed as the laws of the Medes and Persians; any deviation indicated something out of the common. These Spring evenings it was his custom to walk in the garden before dinner. Rose had accordingly opened the long French window on the piazza and the tendrils of the jasmine vine, not yet budding, swung across it; the air was sweet, redolent with the perfume of the wistaria which hung in festoons on the arbor. The sweet, full note of a catbird broke the stillness.

Rose walked to and fro, trying to distract her mind; if she relaxed a moment she heard Fox's voice, saw his strong, pale face. It was pathetically significant that Allestree and Allestree's pain at her finality had dropped from her mind. Love and youth are absolutely selfish; they ignore the universe.

When she came home that day and was alone in her room she had shed some passionate tears; her young, strong heart had rebelled utterly; she wanted happiness, too, wanted it as bitterly as Margaret did, but Margaret had robbed her of it! She gave way, then, to the passion and the rage of her grief, she forgot all Christian maxims, and in her heart stormed against Margaret again, not against Margaret's lover.

Nevertheless she went down bravely to meet her father and take up her life just where she had broken off for those few hours of mad grief and restlessness. But the delay fretted her nerves; it was one thing to be ready, another to keep that smile, that brave air of comfort for an hour, two hours, three! She grew uneasy, too, for the judge—could he be ill? Could anything have happened? A dim foreboding crept through the preoccupation of her mood. She ran to the front window and looked down the long street and saw her father coming slowly toward the house, his head slightly bowed and his tall thin figure showing more than usually the student's stoop of the shoulders.

A swift, pained perception of his age, his feebleness, gave Rose a sudden sharp pang of grief, of foreshadowed loss; the revelation that comes suddenly—like the opening of a window in the soul—of the mortality of those we love, of life's awful uncertainty.

She opened the door with a pale face. "Father!" she exclaimed, "you're so late, I was getting anxious."

He looked up without a smile, his eyes dull and weary. "I was delayed—by business matters," he said simply.

He followed her into the library, and putting down a bundle of papers he carried sank wearily into his great chair and hid his face in his hands without another word.

Rose looked at him keenly, her heart throbbing with a new dismay, and seeing that the fingers which pressed his temples slightly trembled she went to the dining-room and pouring out a glass of wine brought it to him. "You are very tired," she said gently; "try to take this, father; I think you need it."

He looked up blankly, took the glass and tasting the wine set it aside. His face had aged ten years.

In her distress Rose thought only of cheering him. She averted her eyes; it seemed almost an indelicacy to inquire too closely into such apparent distress. "The roses I ordered came today," she said with a forced lightness of tone which jarred; "I thought, per-

haps, we could decide this evening where to set them out. Do you think they'd do best by the south wall, father?"

He passed his hand over his eyes like a man whose sight was failing. "The roses?" he repeated absently; "I do not know. My child," he added in a heavy tone, "something has happened today; I'm practically a ruined man."

She caught her breath, frightened for the moment and taken unawares; in the assured comfort and peace of her life it seemed impossible.

"It's that man—the note you endorsed?" she said.

"Yes," he replied simply, "that and the unfortunate investments I made in New York. They turned out badly two months ago; I did not tell you, Rose, but I was swindled. This morning the note came due and Erhardt has disappeared."

"Oh, the villain!" Rose exclaimed hotly, "and you so kind. Father, can't it be delayed—warded off? Surely something can be done—must you lose all that, too?"

He roused himself with an effort from the cloud which seemed to be enfolding him, shutting down on his stupefied senses. "I shall have to pay the whole obligation; it can't be honorably delayed," he said; "it will sweep away my whole principal, Rose, and leave me nothing but my salary."

"But we can live on that," she exclaimed eagerly, her face brightening; "we can easily live on that, father; you'll see how famously I can manage!"

The judge looked at her with a pitiful tightening of the lines about his mouth, his eyes filled with unshed tears; her ignorance seemed to him the sweetest, the most helpless thing in the world. "But when I die, Rose," he said hoarsely, "and I may die soon—" He rose and walked to and fro before the open window where the soft twilight was falling. He was suddenly bowed with years, shrunk, haggard. "My God, child, there will be nothing for you!" he broke out at last.

She went to him then, throwing her young arms around his neck and stay-

ing him in his walk. He looked at her, bewildered, and she laid her soft cheek against his in a mute caress. "It doesn't matter, father!" she whispered; "don't think of me, don't add that to your burden."

The old man groaned. "My child," he exclaimed, his voice quavering with grief, "my poor child, I can never forgive myself!"

Tears of sympathy filled her eyes, but she smiled bravely. "Why, father, we have so much—here is the house, the——"

"It's mortgaged," he said, and sank heavily into his chair.

For an instant Rose stood appalled. Unconsciously she glanced about her; in the gathering gloom the dear familiar room, the book-lined walls, the littered table, the old clock, seemed suddenly changed. Between yesterday and today, between this morning and tonight was a great gulf fixed. She shivered, a horrible sensation of loss, of unreality, of despair, swept over her young soul and bared it to misery, the poignant, unreasoning misery of youth. Then she saw the bowed white head, the bent shoulders which had borne the heat and burden of the day, and forgot herself. She knelt by his chair and slipped her arms around his neck. "Nothing matters, dear daddy, while we have each other," she whispered, a little sob in her voice.

He put his shaking hand on her head. "My poor child!" he repeated.

She raised her head, a soft light in her eyes. "Father, you'll let me sing now," she said, "you'll let me sing—I know I can make a fortune for us both. Mancini told me that with a year in Paris I could be ready. He believes in my voice, father, and you know he has trained two great sopranos."

The judge shook his head sadly.

"But now, daddy," she pleaded, "now when it will save me from poverty, and I love it, oh, I love it! May I go, just for six months?"

Again the judge shook his head, his lips almost formed "no," but Rose's arms tightened around his neck.

"Don't say it, daddy!" she cried,

"don't say it, for then you will not unsay it! Truly, truly I must sing; it is my greatest desire, my happiness, the talent that was given me—surely I mustn't be the one to fold it in a napkin! Daddy, daddy, say yes."

He sat looking out of the window with unseeing eyes, his lips compressed. The demand struck at his dearest prejudices, his firmest convictions, yet to leave her helpless and poor!

In the still room the ticking of the clock sounded with monotonous distinctness; it seemed to jar the silence. Twilight fell fast, the corners were dark, the two faces in the foreground showed white and tense.

At last the judge sighed heavily. "I must give in," he said with slow reluctance; "in my folly I have wrecked us both. I'm no longer fit to command. You may sing, child, but I hope it will only be in concerts."

Rose's face fell, but hope kindled; one step was gained, and like every wedge it makes the other easier. "But I must go abroad to be finished for any really great success," she said; "father, can't you go with me?"

The judge looked at her strangely. "Child, I never thought," he said harshly; "I haven't the money to send you yet; you'll have to wait until we can save it; it's another denial for you, Rose. You know I sent a large cheque to Allestree the other day, and there is little left now."

A wild hope leaped in her heart; she knew the cheque would come back, but dared she tell him? Would he take it if it came? Her lips trembled—she was glad of the darkness. "Father, I shall sing," she said bravely, "perhaps—who knows—I shall sing so well that you'll be proud of me and sit and applaud and send me bouquets."

He wiped away the gathering moisture in his eyes. "I've always been proud of you, Rose!" he said sadly, "but that a child of mine should have to sing for a living! The Lord's hand is heavy upon me in my old age," he added pitifully, completely broken down.

The girl's arms were closer about his

neck; her own sorrow, her thoughts of Fox were lost in her love for the old man in his distress. "Who knows?" she cried with new, sweet courage almost gay in her bravery, "perhaps I shall be as lucky as Patti and we'll have a great fortune and a palace to live in! Oh, daddy, I shall be so happy to sing!"

But he sat motionless, his chin upon his breast and his dull eyes fixed on the open space beyond the window where the lilac-bush stood like a ghost in the gathering night.

XVIII

Fox sat at his writing-table turning over and signing some papers left there in methodical order by his stenographer. He was going out of town at last, and the thought of escape from the oppression of the last few weeks was like a breath of sweet, fresh air from the hills where he was born. But even with the prospect of this reprieve he did his work mechanically, glancing up occasionally at the waving tree-tops which were on a level with his open windows and limited his view.

Sandy lay at his feet waiting impatiently for his daily run and in sympathy with his master's mood. Fox spoke to him once or twice as he paused in his work, and once he bent down and caressed the faithful creature's head; there was comfort in the sense of dumb companionship. Yet at this very moment of depression he was aware that he had achieved a signal political triumph. His last speech before the closing of Congress had resounded from one end of the country to the other, and been caught up and echoed abroad. He had healed a breach in the party, plucked victory from defeat, and his name was on every lip.

A few months ago the significance of it would have stirred him deeply, his keen political foresight would have shown him the greatest possibilities; now it was Dead Sea fruit. He knew that in a year, in less time, he must take a step which would inflict a sharp injury to his career, which would, perhaps, lose him his popularity forever.

And a few weeks ago how differently the world had looked! Then such a victory as he might now easily win would have meant greater honor to offer to the girl he loved.

His lips tightened and he bent to his work. He was still reading and signing letters when there was a knock at his door, and he opened it to admit Louis Berkman. Berkman had been away and, returning but a few days before, was not fully aware of the current gossip, but he had just heard of Fox's achievement and came in with breezy congratulations.

"My dear fellow, I always said you had it in you! Some day we shall get you in the White House!"

Fox laughed a little bitterly. "It will be a long day, Berkman," he said coolly; "the newspapers make a great deal of fuss over a small matter."

"Not at all! I just saw Wingfield, and you know he hasn't much reason to love you; he told me that you'd be Secretary of State in three months."

Fox bit his lip. "Wingfield's an old fool!" he retorted sharply.

Berkman laughed. "Oh, I know about White, he'll have to go; I'm jolly sorry on account of his wife, she's no end of fun! What the devil has he been doing with that Osborne woman's help? I heard in New York that she had sold information to Wall street and something about our Navy to Japan."

"I don't believe that!" said Fox flatly. "White hasn't done that; it's only meant as an attack on him, of course. They say everything of Mrs. Osborne; they always have."

"Nevertheless White will go out; I hear that everywhere," said Berkman obstinately; "and then you'll come in."

Fox smiled with exceeding bitterness. "Then I shall not come in," he retorted quietly; "I sha'n't go into the Cabinet."

Something in his tone at last warned Berkman, and he colored deeply with embarrassment. Certain vague rumors took shape in his mind and he remembered suddenly Margaret's mood after they had left Fox and Rose to-

gether in Rock Creek Park. He reached over and took a cigarette from the box on the table and lighted it to hide his confusion.

"I believe you're right," he said with assumed lightness of tone; "the Cabinet isn't as brilliant an opportunity as the House. At any rate I congratulate you, my dear fellow, and I wish you all success."

Meanwhile old Mrs. Allestree sat opposite to Judge Temple in his library; the door was closed and they were alone save for the birds in the garden, for the windows were wide open, cool, striped awnings shading the room from the warm glow of the afternoon, which steeped that secluded spot in slumberous calm.

"Stephen, I'm the criminal," she said firmly; "Robert had nothing whatever to do with it, there's your old cheque and you've got to keep it!"

The judge colored painfully; he had aged twenty years in the last few weeks and his old friends saw it. Once or twice she had winked back her tears, but her voice was acrid.

"I can't keep it and keep the picture," he said firmly. "Robert has earned the money, I distinctly stipulated that I should pay the regular price for the portrait."

"And Robert never meant you should! My dear friend, you and I know that he loves Rose; why hurt the boy's feelings?"

"That's one reason why I can't accept it, don't you see—?" The judge stopped abruptly.

The old woman nodded. "Yes," she said, "I see. I know Rose doesn't love him, I wish she did. I hope and pray she may! But that's neither here nor there; as for the money, Robert won't have it."

"Then I shall return the picture, and I should like to keep it, especially if Rose goes abroad."

She looked at him with exasperation. "You know Rose can't go without that money, you just admitted that you couldn't afford it!"

"Which was not an appeal for charity," flashed the judge hotly.

"Stephen, I'm ashamed of you!" she exclaimed; then her eyes brightened and she looked at him with new defiance. "You can't have the picture. Robert will keep it; he loves it better than anything else; you sha'n't insult him with money for it; I won't have it, sir! Where are your old ideas of chivalry? One would suppose that you were one of these new vulgar people who think that money is the criterion of everything, that they can buy shares in paradise! You've lived too long in the neighborhood of the new rich; I'm really ashamed of you. I hated to have Robert part with the picture anyway; he sha'n't do it now, for he'll never take pay for it!"

The judge looked blank, his hands trembled. "But I wanted it!" he said plaintively. "I can't stand in the child's light, but"—he passed his shaking hand over his forehead—"I shall miss her terribly."

Mrs. Allestree nodded wisely without any sign of relenting. "I know," she said, "so shall I! But Robert won't take pay for the picture; I fancy *you* selling a picture of the woman you loved!"

The old man sighed profoundly, staring at the floor, distinctly aware that she was tapping her foot impatiently and eying him like an angry sparrow, her head on one side. The silence was painful; they both heard the bees in the trumpet creeper which hung blooming over the bow-window.

After a while she stole a cautious, amused look at him, then she stirred eagerly in her chair. "Stephen, I've just thought of a way! Robert will, of course, keep the picture, but he'll lend it to you while Rose is away."

Her manner was a trifle too elaborately casual, but the judge did not observe it, a shamed look of relief stole over his face; he passed his handkerchief across his brow, pushing back the scant white hair. "And I can give it back as soon as she comes home," he said with almost an eager note in his voice.

"Yes," Mrs. Allestree replied in a matter-of-fact tone, stern business in her eye as she added: "you'll have to give it back at once, Stephen, and, of course, you'll be responsible for it while it's here. Now, you give that cheque to Rose; I want to hear the child sing."

The judge sighed profoundly, his head bowed. "I'd rather be whipped, Jane," he said brokenly, "but the child has set her heart on it—and I've shown myself an old fool!"

Mrs. Allestree rose. "You have!" she said uncompromisingly, "but then we're both 'way behind the times. In the first place you've had only one wife and I've had only one husband! Margaret White left for Omaha today; of course she'll be divorced and married to my nephew in half an hour. I've some hope now of being fashionable, if I can get a motor accident in the family! And you're broken-hearted because your girl wants to sing in public. Tut, Stephen, you're a hopeless old foggy. Go and marry Martha O'Neal!"

XIX

It was early in the following December before Mrs. Allestree again came face to face with the situation which was so intimately connected, though in such different ways, with the happiness of two members of her family, her son and her nephew. The long months that had intervened, however, had not dulled her remembrance of that vivid scene in Margaret's bedroom, or lessened the degree of her secret sympathy—which was in exact opposition to her judgment.

It was a long time indeed before she could recur to that scene without a poignant feeling of guilt; her conscience pinched her with self-righteousness; she had found the mote in her sister's eye without seeing the beam in her own; she had judged without experience. However, after a while this sensitiveness was developed in a thicker moral coating, and she began again to view the affair with horror. The two

little White children were constant spectacles in the parks with their two French nurses and their general air of bewildered desolation, it was perfectly well known that Estelle had raised a terrible outcry for her mother and refused to be comforted, in spite of the conscientious efforts of poor old Mrs. White, who, whatever her faults, was sincere in her devotion to the two poor little waifs of wealth.

Mr. White, meanwhile, had created fresh scandal by his open devotion to Lily Osborne, and would probably have been still more outrageous if that astute young woman had not judiciously absented herself from the city at the very moment when society had reached the limit of its endurance, but her disappearance from the surface scarcely arrested White's downward career; he was plunging deeper and deeper, and there were many rumors of scandals connected with his administration which would lead to his dismissal from the Cabinet. Some secret information from the Navy Department had found its way into the hands of a foreign government, and the way of its passage through White's careless hands to Lily Osborne's and from hers to the representative of the foreign power was unfortunately made too plain to be ignored except on the surface of things, to hush scandal.

December found Washington a little aghast; Congress had just reassembled, Wicklow White had somewhat hastily resigned, almost on the date which, in the previous year, had seen the retirement of Wingfield, and one of the ambassadors had been as hastily recalled, clearing the atmosphere of an international situation with the accustomed scapegoat! That the Cabinet would have to be reorganized was evident, and Berkman's prophecy of eight months before was apparently on the eve of fulfilment. The very atmosphere, surcharged with excitement, seemed to breathe the name of William Fox; only those who knew the secret of Margaret's divorce, which had just been granted in Omaha, divined the fatal combination of circumstances.

Fox had been absent for months in his own State, taking part in a campaign of usual bitterness and importance, and his remarkable powers of organization, his keen policy, his magnetic eloquence, had carried all before him. There had been, in fact, a storm of applause; every newspaper in the country had discussed him as a possible candidate for the Presidency in the following year, his own party with triumphant confidence, and the opposing faction with reluctant admission of his great strength. If anything had delayed his invitation to take a seat in the Cabinet, it was openly hinted to be the jealousy of the Administration and an uncertainty whether such a position would conveniently shelve him or increase his popularity.

To those who knew the whole truth Fox's position was almost tragic, but the man had returned more than usually brilliant and untiring.

Rose had sailed for Europe in the previous June in charge of an elderly cousin and Aunt Hannah, and no one knew the secret of that parting or the cost of it to Fox; no one indeed even surmised it but old Mrs. Allestree.

The last six months had been trying ones to her and she was meditating upon them, sitting before the open fire in her drawing-room, her tea-table at her elbow, waiting for Robert.

She measured the tea into the old Canton teapot, she looked at the lamp under the kettle, and then she turned back to her knitting, working fast without looking at it, counting stitches now and then and making an elaborate pattern with incredible swiftness, her knitting needles flashing in and out as the work slipped from one to the other and back again. The glow of the fire played on her face and showed the soft lines there, the alert, bright eyes, the snowy hair on the temples. The clock struck six and she looked up, expecting Robert, but instead her parlormaid opened the door to admit Mrs. O'Neal.

"Why, Martha, I'm delighted to see you! It's such a bitter evening

I didn't expect a call. Sit down and have a cup of my tea."

"I suppose you've heard the news?" Mrs. O'Neal remarked, after a moment. "Margaret White has returned."

Mrs. Allestree dropped a knitting needle. "When?" she exclaimed rather hastily, while she tried to recover the fugitive.

"Yesterday; she's taken the apartment she had last Spring. Have you any idea how much alimony she got?"

"Good heavens, no!" exclaimed Mrs. Allestree. "Gerty wrote me that White was disposed to be very liberal, and he ought to be!"

Mrs. O'Neal nodded. "He'll marry Lily Osborne, of course, and I shall cut them dead."

"I should hope so!"

"Well, of course, Lily's footing was slippery enough at the best and this passes endurance. Mrs. Wingfield told me that it is absolutely certain that she got money from Von Groten for some kind of information; Lily has no conscience and she's only half an American, thank heaven! Mrs. Wingfield says she saw the cheque——"

"Martha, that woman will say anything!"

Mrs. O'Neal shrugged her shoulders. "So does everybody! If Margaret had only let her get into society she wouldn't have been so bitter now that she's got her chance; I often think that it pays to be polite to these parvenus! I only hope Margaret doesn't expect me to hold her up until this blows over."

Mrs. Allestree smiled involuntarily. "I can't imagine Margaret in the light of a suppliant," she said quietly.

"A mere *façon de parler*, of course, on my part," Mrs. O'Neal retorted; "but Jane, this is all a bad business, it will have to be patched up, but"—she set down her cup and looked earnestly at Mrs. Allestree—"Jane, does she mean to marry your nephew?"

Mrs. Allestree dropped her knitting and held up both hands. "Heaven knows, not I!" she replied; "of course she can't be in the fashion unless she marries again."

"But to marry Fox! That will create a tremendous scandal. Did you know he's been offered the portfolio of State?"

A quiver of excitement passed over Mrs. Allestree's pale face. "Actually—or only metaphorically. Martha?"

"Actually, today—I had it from two Cabinet officers."

Mrs. Allestree's hands fell on her knitting, and she sat looking into the fire. What a nightmare of a complication! To marry Margaret would ruin him, yet not to marry her—

"It isn't generally known yet that he may marry Margaret, if he does—" Mrs. O'Neal held up her hands this time, and her plumes trembled.

"I don't know anything about it, Martha," Mrs. Allestree said judiciously.

Martha O'Neal looked at her shrewdly and smiled, but she changed the subject as she gathered up her furs again preparatory to departure. "Lily Osborne is reported to have made twenty thousand at bridge at the Hot Springs," she observed casually; "I wish I didn't entertain an awful doubt of her integrity."

Mrs. Allestree looked up weakly. "You can't mean she cheats at cards?"

Mrs. O'Neal laughed. "She'd be caught at that, my dear, and ostracized. She only happens to know who to fleece—you can see how rich she grows."

"I heard; Gerty told me that Senator Turkman had advised her judiciously in placing some money in mining shares and there has been a rise; Lily told her."

"Humph!" ejaculated Mrs. O'Neal, finally catching the other end of her sable boa; "it's rather odd, isn't it, that Senator Turkman didn't make any money for himself at the same time? He's terribly embarrassed."

Mrs. Allestree leaned back in her chair and laughed silently. "Martha," she said finally, "you're a sinner and a publican; let me alone! I haven't heard so much gossip in a year."

"My dear Jane," retorted the other woman drily, "you live under a hill."

IN the midst of these eddying swirls of gossip, little muddy pools in the thin ice on which he trod, William Fox made his way with singular self-absorption. Even the vortex of the political campaign had not succeeded in decentralizing his thoughts, and he could not now lose sight of the impending climax.

The clamor of applause, the proffered Cabinet portfolio, which was not without significance as an effort on the part of the Administration to bind him to its interests and avert his candidacy in the ensuing year, all fell short of their effect. Such brilliant prospects were indeed stultified to his mental vision by the chilling knowledge that he must soon outrage the feelings of his friends and reanimate his enemies. There were moments when the future which lay before him loomed so black and unfriendly that he could not endure the thought, and he found it well-nigh impossible to picture himself playing the rôle of lover and husband to the woman who had twice thwarted his life, first by her careless rejection of his love and then by her determined demand upon his honor. He should marry her, but beyond that bald fact his mind refused to go. He had erred and he would resolutely pay the cost, and it would be heavy. He realized that, realized the probable collapse of his career, the long years of building up which must follow, the impossibility of living down the scandal of such a marriage under such circumstances.

He knew that Margaret was in town, but he had not yet gone to see her; it seemed impossible that he should go. Yet the plain actualities of the case could not be denied. He was aware, however, of a feeling of keen thankfulness that the House under pressure of some special business, was sitting late and that the organization of committees and the hundred other calls involved him in such a round of duty that he could well excuse delay.

Yet when the House rose one day at five o'clock, and he had time to go to see Margaret, he went instead on foot

to Allestree's studio. He had seen but little of his cousin in the past few months; perhaps because he was haunted with a secret dread that Rose would finally marry Allestree, and he hated the thought, with all a lover's selfishness.

The snow was falling fast and the streets were sheeted in white when he and Sandy approached the old house on the corner, and he noticed that the windows of Lerwick curiosity-shop were coated thick with frost. A bright light in the upper window assured him that the painter was still at work, and stamping the snow from his feet he ascended the narrow stair to the studio.

Allestree, in his shirt-sleeves, was engaged in putting away some old canvases and cleaning up his workshop, and was somewhat startled by the unexpected entrance of Sandy and his master.

"I hardly thought to find you here so late," Fox remarked as he greeted him, "but I saw the light and came up."

"I was house-cleaning," Allestree explained; "I can't trust the janitor in here until I put things in shape. Besides, mother is away and there's no hurry about going home."

Fox expressed surprise at his aunt's absence at this season, and Allestree explained further that she had gone to Orange to visit a younger sister who was ill there; a fact which the nephew of both had forgotten.

"I've intended to go to see Aunt Jane every day," Fox remarked, seating himself on the end of Allestree's brass wood-box and looking at the general disorder with an absent eye, "but I've been busy and"—he laughed bitterly—"she has let me know pretty plainly that she doesn't approve of me."

"A sure sign of her devotion," retorted Allestree drily; "she is always taking sides when her affections are involved. I've often thought you were more after her own heart than I, William."

"God help her, I hope not!" Fox exclaimed with such abrupt passion that his cousin stared.

"I heard this morning that you had

been offered the State Department," he said quietly; "are congratulations in order?"

The other man laughed with great bitterness. "My dear Robert," he replied, "I've been offered the moon, but being merely mundane I can't pull it down."

"Well, I'm not sure that the Cabinet is even desirable for you! I've known it to quietly swallow up more than one bit of Presidential timber," Allestree observed, turning his attention to the canvases he was tying together with unsteady fingers.

"Desirable or not, I have refused it," Fox said curtly.

There was a pause; Allestree put away some boxes and collected his scattered brushes. Fox, looking about the studio with a moody glance, observed that a curtain was drawn before the little tea-table where Rose had made tea, and the chair in which she had posed was gone. He was not at a loss to understand these signs, and he recalled the little scene, with its air of domesticity, their gaiety, the tender beauty of her drooping profile as she bent over her teacups; he even remembered how the light from the alcohol lamp glowed softly on her face and caught the golden tints in her hair. He stifled a groan. The whole covetous passion of his soul had surged up at the thought, and he was to see her married at last to this good, harmless, slow cousin who was so worthy of her because of his clean, unspotted life and his honest love! He glanced keenly at Allestree and saw the haggard trouble of his face, the lines on his brow and about his mouth, with almost a pang of joy. There was no assurance of happiness here, only a kindred trouble. The hard element of his personal feeling melted a little, and he turned to the painter with renewed friendliness. "You have heard of the Temples?" he said guardedly; "is the old man out of his troubles, and has Rose returned?"

Allestree shook his head, avoiding his eye. "The judge is still in the quagmire; he was miserably imposed upon and I fancy there is nothing left

but his salary. He has been making gigantic efforts to save that old house; you know it's mortgaged, and he seems ill and worn, though he goes regularly to court."

"Who holds the mortgage?" Fox asked absently.

Allestree named a large trust company, and began an eager search behind his easels, apparently excluding Rose from his reply. But Fox was not done. "And his daughter?" he said in a low voice, caressing Sandy, who had laid his head upon his knee as a gentle reminder that it was time to go.

"She is still in Paris; she wrote my mother that she was succeeding very well with her lessons and hoped for the best." Allestree's voice betrayed his extreme reluctance to produce even these hard facts.

Fox rose abruptly and going to the window thrust aside the curtain and looked out. The storm had increased and the street light opposite shone behind a dazzling whirl of snowflakes which were swept before the wind and hurled themselves against the pane in a wild rush of blinding white.

Fox turned away and began to walk to and fro, his hands plunged into his pockets and his head sunk on his breast. Allestree glancing at him once or twice was shocked by the drawn grayness of his face, the absolute despair in his dark, deep-set eyes. At last he looked up, with a bitter smile. "Good God!" he exclaimed abruptly, "if I were only coward enough to shoot myself!"

"A very unprofitable move," remarked his cousin coldly, "and it leaves the blame to others."

Fox nodded. "Precisely," he said, "and to a woman. But, my dear Allestree, if you want to create a hell for a man, find one who loves a young, lovely, untried girl with all his soul, and then force him to marry another woman!"

His cousin bit his lip, the color rushing over his face. "No easy matter, I fancy," he said; "you couldn't make the man do it; he'd back out at last!"

Fox gave him a strange look; he had never intended to make such an

admission to Allestree; it had been wrung from him by the stress of his own feeling and now he would not recall it. "You think so? You think it cannot be done? The shooting would be preferable," he added grimly, "but unhappily a man's honor lives after him."

His cousin turned sharply and held out his hand; the gesture was involuntary. "Upon my soul, William, I'm sorry for you!" he exclaimed with much feeling.

Fox took his hand and wrung it. "You'll make her happy, Allestree," he exclaimed with profound emotion; "she'll marry you."

Allestree smiled sadly. "She's refused me," he said with a tone of finality which carried conviction, if not relief.

Fox turned away with a smothered groan, and groping for his hat and coat went out without another word.

At that moment the tumult of his heart repudiated every other claim and demanded happiness with an unscrupulous passion which excelled Margaret's own.

XXI

It was the following evening that Margaret rose restlessly and looked out of the window of her little hotel drawing-room. She knew that the House had risen at five; she had telephoned twice to ascertain that fact, and her note of the morning should have brought Fox straight from the Capitol.

It was now almost six o'clock; the streets were lighted and thronged with people, some hurrying home from office or shopping, others still on those endless social rounds which had once been the orbit of Margaret's life. She thought of that existence now, its brilliance, its flattery, its hollowness, with a shudder. Between the two periods of her life there was a chasm. It had been only a few months, but those months had been years in her emotional existence, and her stormy soul struggling through the depths of it had worn away the body which with her

seemed but the beautiful ephemeral garment of a wild spirit. When it was over, the divorce with its hideous publicity, its sordid details, its piercing accusations, and freedom had come to her with almost blinding reality, she had declared that she should rebuild her life, forget all, be happy—happy!

She had expected at once some message from Fox, some sign of sympathy, but when none came she interpreted his silence by her own heart; he was loth, she thought, to show too much joy at once. They could wait! How sweet it was to think that once again they had their lives before them; they were still young, the world had potent possibilities of happiness for them. The sheer joy of the thought drove the blood to her heart; she could not breathe sometimes, but lay panting, her head thrown back on her pillows and her arms flung wide and helpless, until Gerty came and with trembling hand administered restoratives and threw up the windows. They called them heart attacks, but it did not matter, nothing mattered now; she would begin all over again. Her old life had slipped from her, as though its shackles, having been stricken off, had left no scar. She had been in Washington a week, but she had not asked to see her children; she could not; the thought of them sent a shiver through her; they were the visible and actual links which bound her to the past, the past which her soul loathed.

She had waited eagerly for Fox, aware that he was in the city before her arrival, and when he did not come she still attributed his absence to a reluctance to be too soon to claim her. That he loved her she never doubted, and her heart trembled at the thought of that meeting which must come at last, with all its sweetness, its fulfilment, after her long waiting. That morning she had written him, and now she watched the clock, carelessly aware that Gerty English was also watching it, and that the girl seemed disconcerted and awkward with her work over Margaret's letters and books.

Margaret went openly to the window and drew aside the curtains to watch

the long, brilliantly lighted street, where the snow lay yet in white drifts between the muddy slush of traffic, and she returned openly to the fire to look at the clock on the mantel. At first the delay had been almost sweet; she liked to dwell upon the thought of seeing him, of being happy again, but at last it grew irksome and she paced nervously to and fro, her hands clasped behind her head, scarcely vouchsafing an answer to Gerty's occasional questions.

Time passed; it was nearly half-past six before her maid came in to announce a visitor, and Margaret turned, hiding herself a little in the shadow of the curtain that she might see him first when he entered.

As the door finally opened to admit Fox, Gerty English rose rather hastily and retreated to one of the other rooms, with her arms full of books and papers, and he found himself face to face at last with Margaret.

There was an eloquent silence; he was painfully aware of the change in her, that the delicate hollows in her cheeks were sharpened, while her eyes seemed larger and more brilliant, and there was a wistfulness, a soft, tremulous happiness and expectation in her expression which touched him to the heart. She had never looked so young, so fragile and so gentle since those old days when as half child, half woman, he had loved her. That dead love lying between them now made an impassable barrier; she could as little rekindle it as she could reclaim a fallen star. Some dim, half-interpreted perception of this chilled her heart and stayed the passionate greeting on her lips; she stood a moment looking at him, terribly aware of the calmness of his bearing, his pallor, his dark, troubled eye which neither kindled nor blenched at the sight of her, but met hers with a studied gentleness which expressed neither joy nor reluctance. A keen pang of dread tore her heart, but the next instant joy, wild, almost childish joy at the sight of him, welled up and swept away her doubts.

"Oh, William!" she exclaimed, with trembling lips, holding out both hands,

"at last, at last! It has been eons since we met!"

"And you look ill," he replied kindly. "Margaret, I hoped to see you well again. How is this?"

Her eyes sought his face, eager, feverish, questioning; her heart trembled. Was this all?—this stilted, quiet, commonplace greeting? She checked the cry of reproach which rose to her white lips, and smiled—a wan and pallid smile. "I'm quite well," she replied with sudden calm; "you forget the months have been long and troubled ones; I suppose I grow old!"

"I never saw you look younger, more as you used to look ten years ago," he exclaimed involuntarily.

"Do I?" There was a tremulous note of eagerness in her voice, and a faint blush passed over her face, but she evaded his hand, which he had stretched out again to clasp hers, and went quietly to a shaded corner where neither lamplight nor firelight fell too sharply on her. "Sit down, William, and tell me about yourself."

He obeyed her mechanically, unconscious that his manner had betrayed anything, but aware of a sudden indefinable change in her, a restraint and repression. "There is nothing to tell," he said with some impatience; "the old story—primaries, conventions, a stormy campaign and finally, as you know, my reelection is assured—if I care for it!" he added, a hard new note of indifference in his voice.

She heard it and leaned forward a little on her cushions, trying to read his face, studying every fine and classic outline of the strong head, the brow, the deep-set, brilliant eye, the thin-lipped, sensitive mouth, the clean-shaven strong jaw and chin. It was his face; how often she had dreamed about it and dreamed of it as turned to her with the glow of love and joy on it, but how pale it was, how hard, how resolute!

"I knew the campaign was hotly contested, but I never doubted your success," she said simply; "you know I always believed in you."

He turned sharply and looked at her.

"What is the matter, Margaret? You are not yourself."

She smiled. "No," she admitted, looking at him with an enigmatical expression, "no, I am not myself; the old Margaret is dead—and buried! Not even Mrs. Wingfield would know me; I burnt up my last red hat yesterday, William."

He answered her smile involuntarily, but his eyes remained grave, almost stern. He turned abruptly, holding out his hand. "Margaret," he said, "I came—of course you know it—to ask you to be my wife."

She drew a long breath and was silent, her eyes on his face; she was wonderfully calm.

"It seems to me that the sooner it is over the better for both of us," he went on hurriedly; "there will, of course, be some talk; we must face it together."

Without answering him she bent over and picked up a half-sheet of the morning newspaper from the floor, and after glancing at it held it out to him.

"There is an article there about you," she said in a low voice; "it says you have refused the State Department; is that true?"

He put the paper aside with a little impatience. "Of course it's true," he said; "I refused it three days ago."

She was again silent for an instant while she folded the paper into plaits. "Why did you refuse it?" she asked.

Fox moved sharply and turned his face away, looking at the fire. "That does not concern us, Margaret," he said gravely; "our marriage is the only question now; I——"

She interrupted him. "Tell me," she insisted; "it's my right to know; this had something to do with me, with the prospect of—of your marrying Wicklow's divorced wife. I know it! Tell me the truth."

"Of what avail?" he retorted with evident reluctance, his cheek red.

"I have a right to know," she reiterated.

He smiled bitterly. "The situation is quite clear, isn't it? I can't take White's place in the Cabinet and White's wife; it would be monstrous."

She leaned back in her chair, shading her face with her thin hand, which trembled slightly; she tried to speak, but her dry lips refused to move. His manner, no less than his words, had ruthlessly torn away the last shreds of her self-deception, and her poor shivering soul shuddered at this revelation of the hardness in him, the eternal note of egoism. How plain it was, how simple, how inexorable! The man's love had died, and hers had fed itself upon a chimera, a phantasm of her imagination, a dream of the past! Her hand trembled so that she let it fall in her lap and averted her face.

Something of the anguish she felt reached him; he perceived her thought without knowing that he had laid bare his heart to her, and he felt a pang of remorse for his words, though she had wrung them from him with a woman's besotted madness, a woman's wild determination to probe her own agony to the core.

"It is of no consequence to me, Margaret," he said kindly; "I shall give it all up and go away with you; we must build it up from the beginning again. Only it is best to have it over."

She smiled faintly, looking into the fire which had fallen from the andirons and lay in red coals on the broad hearth. "Tell me," she said abruptly, turning her full gaze on him, "I have been away and I do not know—where is Rose Temple? Is she still in Paris?"

There was a striking change in his face as though his features, made of potter's clay, had suddenly fixed themselves into the shape of a mask, stern and unchanging in its finality. "Yes, she's in Paris," he replied, with strong reluctance to speak of her; "I know nothing else. You can ask Allestree."

"Ah, then I suppose it will end happily at last," Margaret said softly; "she will marry Allestree; I always thought so."

Fox rose abruptly and walked to the fire, standing a moment looking down at its fallen embers, his back toward her. She could not see his face, but in the covetous agony of her soul she needed no sight she knew! A gray shadow

passed over her own features, her eyes closed, she shivered from head to foot.

After a moment of terrible silence he turned. "When can we be married, Margaret?" he demanded with passionate haste; "it must be soon, it cannot be too soon!"

She rose, looking slighter and more frail than ever. "No, it cannot be too soon; I will decide; I have no preparations to make," she added, with a little, mocking smile. "I'm sorry, William. I'll be but a sober bride; you should have married a young girl and had a grand wedding with a flourish of trumpets."

"Which I hate," he said bluntly, "as you know."

"As I know?" she laughed a little wildly; "I have known very little! You must go now; I—I'm not very strong yet, and the excitement——"

"Has been too much," he said kindly. "I'll come again tomorrow—you can tell me then; it can't be too soon."

"What an ardent lover!" she said, her lips trembling. "I'm proud of you, William; you do famously. I—I—" She broke off and suddenly laying her thin white hands lightly on his shoulders she kissed his cheek, turned, evaded his touch, and bursting into uncontrollable weeping ran from the room.

XXII

MARGARET, leaning a little on Gertrude English, stopped her with a slight pressure on her arm, and shading her eyes with her free hand stood gazing down the long vista of the sunlit avenue. A final recognition of the contrast between realities and the dreams which had changed and warped her life came upon her with a shock which made familiar objects seem strange and distorted. A shudder of anguish shook her slight frame and stole the blood from her lip; stripped at last of all illusions, facing the immutable laws of life, she felt as though she had been thrust out into the streets, homeless and naked and ashamed; a wrecked soul to wander henceforth up and down

on the face of the earth and find no place. How strange, how different from yesterday! The tremulous love, the hope half justified, the unscrupulous, unflinching desire for happiness—where were they? Gone, shriveled, dead! And she was not dreaming, she was wide awake, this was life, life with its inexorable bonds, its laws, its justice, its cruel requitals, all else had been a dream! Happiness—what was it? A phantom of some man's imagination, the flaming sword of the angel at the Garden of Eden.

Before her lay the busy, beautiful thoroughfare, alive with carriages and motor-cars, with gay people, children, old women and perambulators. The sun had already swept away all but a few vestiges of snow; it was one of those Spring days which come to us in December. At her very feet were some pansies blooming hardily.

She walked on, unconscious of the curious glances which followed her slight, elegant figure, her small pinched face under the great hat with its toppling plumes; unaware, too, that women leaned forward in passing carriages, looked eagerly and sank back into the friendly shelter, glad to escape the necessity of recognition until someone should decide upon the proper course—rehabilitation or oblivion.

Gerty, shrewd and watchful, saw and made mental notes. She decided swiftly who should be struck off the list when Margaret's star rose again; no court chamberlain ever drew lines tighter than she at that moment, because, in her pity and her affection, she resented every slight with bitter zeal.

Margaret, meanwhile, walked on, regaining her self-control with an effort; her large, melancholy eyes gazing dreamily ahead of her. "Gerty," she said at last, "do you suppose anyone is ever really happy?"

"Oh, mercy, yes!" retorted that matter-of-fact young woman in great astonishment. "I am, often. There are so many nice things in the world, Margaret, and when one has money—" Miss English drew a long breath; it expressed her thought.

Margaret smiled bitterly. "Is that the sum total, Gerty? Is there nothing else?"

"Oh, yes, of course, but not to have to pinch and work and reason, just to be vulgarly downright rich once! I shouldn't ask much else," said Gerty ecstatically.

"You have no imagination, Gerty," Margaret replied; "that's been my curse; I've imagined myself into a fool's paradise! As for money—I've had it all my life; it never gave me anything I wanted."

"Oh, Margaret!" Miss English almost sobbed, "think of all you've had, of all you've got, of all you're going to have!" she added incoherently.

"Of all I'm going to have?" Margaret repeated, with a strange smile. "My dear Gerty, the prospect is certainly blinding. Thank you!"

Gerty stared. She did not understand, and she dared not press the question; she could not but perceive the cold agony in Margaret's eyes.

Their walk had brought them to a little triangle between the streets, and as they crossed above it a child's voice cried out after them with a shrill little note of joy: "Oh, mama, there's mama!"

Gerty felt the hand on her arm tighten, and the shiver which ran through the figure at her side was almost as perceptible. They both turned, and looking across the grass-plot saw two French nurses, a child in a carriage and Estelle running toward them, her small face flushing with eagerness, her pale hair streaming in the breeze. She came swiftly, reached them and, with the first unchecked impulse of her life, flung her arms around her mother. "Mama! mama!" she cried, "I've wanted you so much!"

Margaret looked at her strangely for a moment, then her lips twitched and tears came into her eyes, as she stooped down and clasped the child close. For the first time the instinct of maternity spoke; she had seen, too, a strange, vague likeness to herself in the small, upturned face, one of those fleeting glimpses

that come in a look. "Did you really want me, Estelle?" she asked gently, submitting to the child's wild joy with a new, surprised tenderness.

"Oh, mama, you're coming home?" Estelle sobbed, clinging to her; "you're coming back to us? Oh, where have you been, mama?"

Margaret kissed her and rose, putting her off a little; she saw that people were looking at them, and a slow dull flush rose to her forehead. "Yes, I'm coming," she said with an effort. "I'll—I'll come tomorrow, Estelle, and ask Grandmother White to let me take you for a while. You must be good, child; don't cry, mama can't bear it!"

"Come now, mamal!" Estelle wailed, holding her dress with desperate fingers and calling to her little brother, who still clung to his nurse, staring as if he saw a stranger.

The two Frenchwomen were huddled together, not sure of their instructions and obviously alarmed. Margaret looked over at them and gently detached Estelle's fingers from her draperies. "I'll come tomorrow," she said more firmly; "now run and play."

But the child caught at her skirts again, still sobbing; she had felt her mother's arms about her, and half the dread and fear of desertion which had hung over her, half the talk of the nurses which had frightened her, was swept away; she had a mother. "Oh, mama," she sobbed, "take me with you—I won't make any noise!"

Margaret bent and kissed her again, her strange, wild look almost frightening poor Gerty, who stood completely discomfited and at a loss, her honest blue eyes full of tears. "There, there!" the mother whispered, "I'm glad you love me, Estelle; I'm coming, coming soon. Oh, Gerty, go home with her!" she added suddenly; "take her away—I—I can't bear it!"

Gerty obeyed with a pale face. She bent down and whispered to Estelle, kissed and cajoled and threatened until the child let go her mother's skirt and began to cling to the girl whom she really knew far more intimately, for the good-hearted little secretary had

spent many an hour in that gloomy, magnificent nursery. Gerty's hands shook, but she held the child, told her about some lovely things she was going to bring her, a doll, a fairy-book, a toy which ran about the floor of its own accord.

In the midst of it Margaret turned and fled; she had not dared to go to the little boy, although, quite unacquainted with his mother, he was merely staring in a dull, infantile way, his finger in his mouth, ready, no doubt, to raise a sympathetic wail if his sister's grief warranted a chorus.

The mother, whose rights in the children had been settled by the courts at six months in the year, if she desired it, went on blindly along the sunny avenue, which seemed now to mock her with its gaiety. She turned sharply away from a crowded circle into another street, hardly conscious where she went, but bent upon escape, oblivion, silence.

The child's cry had touched her chilled and starving heart; she saw her life revealed; she had thrust away the ties of nature, the demands of natural love and duty in her mad pursuit of happiness; she had lost all and gained nothing.

She put up a shaking hand and drew down her veil; her lips were dry and parched; it was difficult to breathe; she had to relax her pace. Another corner brought her to an abrupt and horrified pause. She came face to face with Mrs. O'Neal at a moment when she felt that she could least abide the sight of anyone. But with the shock of recognition her scattered senses recovered themselves, her nerves vibrated again, she summoned back her will.

"Margaret!" exclaimed the old lady, pausing, with her skirts gathered up and her foot on her carriage-step, just the shadow of surprised restraint in her manner, the indefinable change that greets the altered social scale; "I'm—I'm delighted to see you; how are you, my dear?"

"Well," Margaret replied, with an odd little laugh, for her quick ear had caught the note; "don't I look so?"

The bird of paradise on Mrs. O'Neal's hat trembled. "No," she said flatly, "you don't; you need building up; you should go to the country for a while. I'm due at bridge now, or I should make you get in and drive with me."

"Thank you, I couldn't," Margaret replied with forced calm; "I wish you luck at cards instead."

Mrs. O'Neal glanced at her coachman, stiff and expressionless upon the box, then she leaned over and put a gentle hand on the younger woman's arm. "My dear, I congratulate you," she murmured; "you're lucky to be free. I was so shocked to read this morning that Mr. White had married Lily Osborne yesterday."

Margaret suppressed her start of surprise. "Has he?" she said. "I forgot to read the paper, and Gerty misses everything except the ninety-cent bargains."

"Yesterday—in New York!" said Mrs. O'Neal tragically; "I hope you've got the children."

Margaret quietly withdrew her arm. "Thanks, yes," she said; "I'm afraid you'll be late for your bridge."

As she walked on, her heart sank. Lily Osborne—of course she had known it would be so! But if anything happened to her, and Mrs. White died—poor Estelle!

The cry of the child pursued her. Until now she had thought only of herself, of her own misery, but the touch, the voice of the little girl had reached her very soul; after lying dormant and unknown all those years it was awakening, awakening to a reality so dreadful that it was appalled, without hope, desolate. And shame, the shame of a woman's heart swept over her and shook her being to its depths; the humiliation which comes upon a woman when she knows, by some overwhelming perception, that her love is not fully returned. She felt as if she had stripped her soul naked and left it lying in the dust at Fox's feet.

She walked on; agony winged her feet and she could not be still; she avoided the places which she knew, and turned down strange streets and

byways. She had no thought of time. It grew late; the short Winter day drew to its close; still she walked on. While her strength endured she went on—it seemed as if pursuing fate drove her. She was not physically strong, yet she was walking beyond the endurance of most women.

As the twilight gathered and the lights began to start up here and there, she turned, with a dim realization of her unfamiliar surroundings and her sudden complete exhaustion. It was St. Thomas's Day, four days to Christmas; she had no recognition of it, but, looking up, her eye caught the lighted vestibule of a church, and she saw some women going in to vespers; an impulse made her follow them. The heavy doors swung easily inward, and conscious only of the shelter, the chance for rest, a moment to collect her thoughts, she passed in.

The service was nearly concluded, but she paid no heed to that; moving quietly across the aisle and finding a dark corner, she sat down wearily, and crossing her arms upon the back of the pew in front of her hid her face upon them. Mere physical weariness had brought dull relief to the gnawing pain at her heart; it clouded her brain, too, as weariness sometimes does, and she found the horrible, vivid thoughts which had tormented her slipping softly away into a haze of forgetfulness; her mind seemed a mere blur.

The soft organ tones swelling through the dim church harmonized with her mood; she lost herself, lost the agony of those past hours, and rested there, inert, helpless, without power to think. She was scarcely conscious of what passed around her, her throbbing head felt heavy on her slender arms, and she listened, in a vague way, to the music, aware at last of a stillness, then the rustling and stir of people settling themselves back in the long pews. She stirred herself, turning her face upon her arms.

A voice penetrated the stillness, a voice with that vibrant quality of youth and passionate self-confidence.

"*The wages of sin is death!*"

Margaret started and raised her head. Her eyes, blinded by the sudden light in the chancel, flickered a moment and she passed her hand across them; at last she saw quite plainly a young, strong face, with a tense, eager look, white against the dark finishings of the pulpit; she caught the dazzling white of his surplice, the vivid scarlet of the hood which showed on his shoulders.

"*The wages of sin is death!*" He repeated it, giving out his text in a voice which was resonant with feeling.

Margaret sat back in her corner, gazing at him with fixed, helpless eyes, her very soul dazed under the force of revelation which was coming to her swiftly, overwhelmingly. The revelation of her own life, not of God. As yet she framed no thought of that awful Presence, found no interpretation of the tumult in her own soul, but she knew, at last, that she had sinned. Sinned against herself, her womanhood, her honor, her self-respect, sinned against the man she had married, against the children she had borne, and, at last—oh, God!—against the man she loved.

The wages of sin is death.

She rose, rose with an effort of will, for her knees shook under her, and drawing herself together, summoning all her strength and her pride to hide the agony which was devouring her heart, she drew down her veil and slipped out unnoticed, silent, like a shadow. Once at the door, beyond the ring of that terrible young voice, she paused and steadied herself by laying her hand on a pillar of the portico.

It was now very dark; the electric lights at the corner only made the space where she stood more shadowy and secure; the air was chill, damp, penetrating, and she shivered. A horrible sense of homelessness and misery swept over her; she had cast herself out of a home, she had deserted her children for the love of a man who—oh, God!—who loved her not. She who had dreamed of happiness, lived for it, fought for it, sinned for it, who would have purchased it at the cost of

heaven itself, had found at last, not happiness, but her own soul.

The wages of sin is death!

She wrung her hands in silent agony; was there no escape? She had no belief, but, at last, she felt that the very devils believed and trembled. Was not God pursuing her with vengeance? Who else?

XXIII

At last the tumult of passion subsided and Margaret, still leaning on the pillar of the church portico, looked out with bewildered eyes. Again an overwhelming weakness swept over her and wiped out some of the vivid misery.

She must go home—home! The word brought a dull pang of anguish; she had no right to a home, for she had broken up her own and orphaned her children. She closed her eyes, trying to shut out the thoughts which stormed back, at a word, to assault her poor fagged brain again. Then the soft, sweet notes of the recessional came out to her and she knew that in a few moments the dispersing congregation would find her there; summoning all her flagging energies she stepped down into the street and turning westward was suddenly apprised of the fact that she had been in the old church so often visible from the windows of Allestree's studio. The discovery brought her a feeling of relief; she was near the studio and she could go there and telephone for a cab to take her back to the hotel.

Losing herself in the shadows of the darkest side of the poorly lighted street, she hurried toward the old building on the corner and saw, with relief, the light still shining in Allestree's window as well as in the curiosity-shop below.

She crossed the street and trying the side door found the latch down. In another moment she was toiling wearily up the old stairs, clinging to the balustrade with an absolute need of its support.

To her surprise the studio was empty; she called to Allestree, supposing him to be, perhaps, in his store-room above,

but there was no answer and she sank down in the nearest chair, too weary and helpless to frame her thoughts. An open fire was burning low on the hearth, and a half-smoked cigarette lay on the mantel edge. He had evidently gone out for a moment and would soon return. Margaret roused herself and looked about her with a wretched feeling of strangeness and separation from her own life. She seemed suddenly detached, a mere on-looker where once she had been the centre of the stage. There had stood the portrait of her, and there the picture of Rose; both were gone! She even noticed that the little tea-table was pushed away, and divined Allestree's secret feeling. She knew every detail of the room, the tapestries, the worn Turkey rug, Robert's old cigarette-case. It was intolerable; she rose, and going to the table where the telephone stood, saw Allestree's portfolio and the pen and ink. She would leave a line to explain her visit before she called a cab, and she opened the portfolio to look for a scrap of paper; as she did so her eye fell on the page of a letter written in old Mrs. Allestree's clear hand; unconsciously she read the lines before her:

Margaret has broken up Fox's happiness twice, once when she broke her own engagement to him, and now in separating him from Rose——

She closed the book sharply, suddenly aware of what she did and deeply shamed by it, but the thought of the personal dishonesty of her thoughtless act was lost in the sharper pang of realization; she saw at last the light in which her actions had appeared to others. She stood still, her face frozen, and a cry sprang to her lips from the depths of hidden passion, the cry of some mortally wounded wild creature who faces death alone. She knew it, she did not need to be told it, but others knew it, too! It was the bitter drop in her cup of gall; the wild anguish which swept away all other realities, even the desire for life, amazed her. For one moment she hated Rose with all the strength of her undisciplined soul, the

next a great wave of humiliation submerged her being. She turned, forgetting the telephone, forgetting everything but a desire to escape the meeting with Allestree, groped her way to the door like a blind woman and went downstairs. At the foot she hesitated; a step in the street made her fear to meet Robert at the door, and she turned and plunged into the curiosity-shop. She found herself behind the chintz curtain, in the place which evidently served as a living-room for Daddy Lerwick, and she saw a table spread for supper, while the scent of garlic steamed from a pot on the stove. Hurrying across the room she lifted the curtain and entered the shop.

Daddy Lerwick was leaning on the counter talking to a young girl and passing a necklace back and forth in his fat hands. At the sound of Margaret's step they both turned and looked at her in surprise, a surprise which gave place on his part to servile courtesy. But Margaret scarcely noticed him; instead she saw the pale, worn face of the girl, the pinched misery of her look as she glanced at the stones in Lerwick's coarse fingers. Margaret's eyes, following hers, lighted, too, on the jewels; it was a topaz necklace, the mate to the bracelet which she had prized so long ago. The intuition of misery, the sixth sense of the soul which—no longer atrophied with selfishness—had suddenly awakened within her, divined the secret. She read the suspended bargain in Lerwick's eye, the hopeless anguish in the girl's. It was only an instant; the thought came to her like the opening of a dungeon door on the glare of midday. Then she drew back to avoid an encounter with two more customers who had entered the shop and who began at once to ask the prices of the objects in the windows. Lerwick went forward to answer them; the girl leaned on the counter, hiding her face in her hands; a shiver of misery passed over her and Margaret saw it. Moved by an impulse as inexplicable as it was unnatural, she touched the shabby sleeve. "What is the matter?" she asked softly.

The young woman looked up, startled, but only for an instant; the next the dull misery of her look closed over her face like a mask, though her lip trembled. "He's offered me fifteen dollars," she faltered. "I—I suppose I'll have to take it."

Margaret quietly put out her hand. "Will you sell it to me?" she said. "I will give more and you will not have to give your name."

The girl's cheek crimsoned; she hesitated and gathered the necklace into her hands. The gesture was pathetic; it bespoke the actual pang of parting with an old keepsake.

Margaret saw it. "Come, come with me," she said, and led her back through the door to the studio entrance; she no longer feared to meet Allestree; a new impulse stirred her heart.

Under the light there she opened her purse and hastily counted her money. She had a little over a hundred dollars in small bills. Hurriedly thrusting a dollar or two back into her pocketbook, she pressed the remainder into her companion's hands, saying at the same time: "Keep your necklace, I do not want it; I only wished to help you save it."

The young stranger looked at her in dull amazement, stunned by the incomprehensible sympathy and generosity when she had long since ceased to look for either. She drew a long shuddering breath. "Oh, I can't take so much!" she gasped out; "you—you must keep the necklace!"

Margaret regarded her sadly. "Child," she replied, "I'm more unhappy than you are; I do not want either the money or the necklace; keep them both!"

"Do you really mean it?" the girl whispered, her eyes fastened on the face opposite in absolute wonder and doubt; "you really mean to give me all this—and you want nothing?"

Margaret smiled with stiff lips. "Nothing!"

The pinched, childlike features of the stranger quivered; it seemed as if the frozen sensibilities were melting under this touch of common humanity. Sud-

denly she burst into an agony of tears, slipping down upon the stairs, her slender, shabby figure racked with sobs. "He heard me!" she cried; "there is a God!"

Margaret looked at her strangely. "Do you think so?" she asked vaguely, with parched lips; "do you believe in God?"

"Yes," the girl cried, clasping her hands. "I prayed—oh, God, how I prayed! It seemed as if He didn't hear me, no help came and I couldn't pay; I couldn't pay, and they didn't believe me any more because I'd failed—you don't know, you've never failed like that! I thought God didn't care, that He had forgotten—but now—" she rose from her knees, her face still wet with tears, but singularly changed, "I sha'n't have to do it!" she cried; "here is enough to begin all over again. I can go on; I'm saved! He heard! Don't you believe it? Don't you see it must be so?" she persisted, unconsciously catching at Margaret's draperies and her thin toil-worn hand closing on their richness.

"For you, yes," the older woman replied slowly; "good heavens, I never knew how much money meant before!" she murmured, passing her hand over her eyes again, "and you think—God heard you—God?"

"He sent you!" the girl cried, exultingly, wildly happy; "oh, yes, I'm sure of it—oh, God bless you!"

A strange expression passed over Margaret's face. She leaned back against the wall, pressing her hand to her heart. Then, as the girl still sobbed softly, she touched her shoulder.

"Open the door," she said quietly; "I—I must go; can you help me? I'm a little dizzy."

The young woman sprang to her and put out her arm eagerly. "Let me help you; oh, I'd do anything for you!"

Margaret smiled, a wan little smile that made her haggard, brilliant face weirdly sad. "It is nothing. There, the air from the outside makes me well again; this place is choking!"

The stranger walked with her to the corner, eager to help her, to call a cab,

to put her on the cars, but as Margaret's faintness passed she refused, putting aside her protests with firm dismissal. "No, no, I can go home," she said bravely. "Good-bye; I'm glad I could help you."

"Oh, let me go with you, let me do something!" the girl appealed to her eagerly.

But Margaret dismissed her and they parted, the young stranger hurrying away down a narrow by-street, while her benefactress walked slowly toward the nearest avenue. But she had gone only a few steps when she turned and looked after the shabby figure, which was only a short distance from her. A vivid recollection of that cry that God had heard her prayer, the absolute conviction of it, swept over the stricken woman, and moved by an impulse which she did not pause to question, Margaret ran after the girl through the gathering mist and overtook her, breathless. She turned with a frightened look, full of dread, no doubt, that she must give up the miraculously acquired wealth, and she started when Margaret laid a thin, ungloved hand on her arm.

"I wanted to ask you," she began—and then changed the sentence swiftly into a command: "Pray for me tonight! You believe there is a God—perhaps He'll hear you again!"

"Indeed I will!" the girl cried, bewildered. "Oh, I wish——"

But the unfinished speech was lost; Margaret had turned and swiftly disappeared again into the folds of the mist; like a shadow the girl saw her vanishing into deeper shadows; something uncanny and marvelous seemed to lurk in the very thought of her beautiful, haggard face, the wildness of her smile, and the young woman hurried away, hugging her treasure close, almost persuaded that she had talked face to face with a being from another world.

XXIV

AVOIDING the crowded thoroughfares, and no longer remembering her

physical weariness or that she had walked for hours without food or drink, Margaret hurried on.

She had thought of death, and the means to attain it most swiftly and easily, but as she passed the brilliantly lighted chemist's window, with its arch hung with bright red Christmas bells, she put away the thought; it was too cheap and sensational, and, after all, if there really were a God could she take that swift, shuddering plunge through the blackness of death to meet Him? *The wages of sin is death!* It thundered in her ears, making God the avenging Deity of the Old Testament, for how little do those who preach sometimes divine the pictures which they frame of Him who was lifted up, as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, that all men might be saved!

A strange new light began to come into Margaret's soul, and against it her thoughts took on dark and sharply outlined forms like the shadows thrown on a white screen by the stereopticon; she began to understand. Happiness, after all, was a dream, an imagination, a word; it came not from any visible cause, but lay hidden in every man's heart like hope imprisoned in Pandora's box. The secret of it came to her at last—life moved in an orbit; the past held the future, the future the past; the present was but a connecting link in the inexorable circle, it could not be broken while memory existed, while a reckoning was required. She could no more break the links with her past than she could destroy her immortal soul.

In her heart a new, secret thought, born of the strange girl's gratitude, moved her out of herself. She remembered Mrs. Allestree's words, and her love for Fox suddenly purged itself of its passionate agony, its jealousy, its pain. Like a woman in a dream she found her way at last to the hotel and climbed the stairs. Her face bore too terrible signs of anguish, and she shrank from the elevator and the curious stare of the servants. It was the dinner hour, and the corridors were

deserted. She went quietly to her own room and did not ring for her maid. She noticed that her evening gown had been put out and the fire tended. Gerty was not there; she would scarcely be there before nine o'clock, and Margaret went to her desk and sat down and began to write in feverish haste; if she delayed, if she stopped to think, she might never do it, and she was determined. She bent to her task, white-lipped and haggard, writing page after page to Rose Temple. She poured out her heart; in righting Fox she scarcely thought of herself, except that she should never see him again, that Rose must and should marry him! For abruptly the divine impulse of self-immolation had been born in the midst of the tumult of her soul; a woman's heart, like a eucalyptus-tree, trembles with the remembrance of anguish and the eternal sacrifice of love.

As she finished it the clock struck and she looked up startled; it was eight o'clock; she had been out more than four hours. She sealed her letter, stamped it and rose. For a moment her strength failed her and she stood irresolute, but she was unwilling to trust another hand, and she opened the door and took Rose's letter down to the post herself, avoiding the elevator again. After she had dropped it in the letter-box in the lower hall she climbed the long flight wearily to her room. The fearful energy of the last few hours dropped from her like a cloak, the effort was too much, and she felt an overpowering weakness, a sinking sensation; she had had such moments before and the doctor had furnished her with some restoratives, with a grim injunction to avoid tiring herself. A vision of his grave face flashed across her now and warned her. With the sudden ineffable sinking and yielding, which came over her like a cloud and seemed to drop her slowly, softly into space, was born a keen desire to live; Estelle's voice pierced her memory like a knife; she seemed to hear that plaintive cry,—“Mama, mama, come home!”

She made one more supreme effort to reach the medicines and was, indeed, but a few yards from the cabinet which held them when her strength yielded to that awful dark cloud which seemed to be pressing down upon her, pushing her lower and lower into the depths of silence. She slipped like water to the floor, her head upon her outstretched arms. A faint shudder ran through her; she was dimly conscious of sinking down, down into a black, fathomless abyss. Again Estelle's voice quivered through the clouds and mists and reached her heart; she tried to struggle back, up through vague distances, to answer it, but the mists grew thicker; she heard it once again, no more! The soft, ineffable clouds pressed closer, enfolded her; she sank lower, floated off over the edge of space and lost even thought itself.

XXV

For three days Fox had been under an almost unbearable strain. Before and after speaking to Margaret of their marriage he had plunged in the same agonizing struggle with himself. What diabolical power had been at work to ruin his life, to frustrate his ambitions? The strong egotism of his nature was aroused in all its absorbing passion. On every hand he saw disaster; he had builded well in all respects but one; in that he had miserably failed, and behold the inevitable result! Like Margaret herself, he saw clearly at last; if he had kept away from her, if he had broken from the spell of her fascination and remained out of reach, this would never have been; he had no one to thank but himself. It is usually so; when we get down to the fundamental principles we have ourselves to blame for the fall of the Tower of Siloam.

As he faced the immediate prospect of marriage with another woman, he realized the strength and hopelessness of his love for Rose. To think of her even in the same moment with Margaret was abhorrent to him; he did poor Margaret scant justice at such times, and the vivid realities of her newspaper

celebrity were a scourge to his sensitive pride. For these things he must give up all, he must pay the price. He who crossed his path when this mood was on him was unfortunate—Fox was not a man to spare. His cruel irony, his poignant wit had never been more feared on the floor of the House than they were in those few days before Christmas.

The day after his decisive interview with Margaret he was late at the Capitol, lingering in his committee-room after the others had left. On his way home he dined at the club and was detained there by some out-of-town friends until nearly eleven o'clock. When he finally left the building he started home on foot, and even stopped at a news-stand to buy some papers and magazines. It was twelve o'clock when he went up to his rooms, and he was startled as he walked down the corridor to see his door open and the vestibule lighted. Sandy came to meet him with the air a dog wears who knows that a friend is waiting for his master.

Allestree was sitting by the table in the study, and as Fox entered he rose with a sober face.

"I've been waiting for you for an hour," he said; "I have bad news."

Fox stopped abruptly, his thoughts leaping instantly to Rose. "Bad news?" he repeated in a strange voice.

Allestree met his eye, perhaps read his thoughts. "Yes, the worst," he replied; "Margaret is dead."

"Margaret?" Fox dropped the papers he held, on the table, and looked at him, bewildered. "Impossible!"

"I wish it were so," Allestree said quietly, hurrying on with his disagreeable task; "it seems that she was out today for a long time alone; no one, apparently, knows much about it except the elevator boy, and he says she was away from the hotel four hours or more. As nearly as we know she was on foot and in the streets most of that time. I know she was in my studio while I was out"; he colored as he spoke; he had found his mother's letter on the floor and piecing the facts together had divined much. "She came home alone,

went to her rooms and was found there later, unconscious, on the floor."

"Good God, where was Gerty?" Fox exclaimed, with a gesture of horror.

"Margaret had sent her to Mrs. White with Estelle; there was some painful scene in the street with the child—" Allestree stopped an instant and then, meeting his cousin's eye, he hurried on: "When Gerty finally got to the hotel and found her it was too late, the doctors say that if help had been at hand she might have been saved. As it was she never regained consciousness. Gerty telephoned to my mother, but she will not be back until tomorrow morning; when I got there Margaret was gone."

Fox sank into a chair by the table, and propping his head on his hands stared blankly at a sheet of paper before him. "Why was I not told?" he demanded hoarsely.

"Gerty tried to get you, both at the Capitol and here, but we could not find you."

"I was at the club," Fox exclaimed, and then: "Merciful heaven, Allestree, how terrible, how harrowing! How impossible to realize!"

Allestree looked at him thoughtfully. "Do you think so?" he said. "It has seemed to me for more than a year that I saw death in her face; she had, poor girl, a face of tragedy."

Fox groaned, covering his own face with his hands. His anger against her of a moment before smote him with horrible reproach. Living, he had ceased to love her; dead, she seemed suddenly to fill his life to the exclusion of all else; she came to him again in the guise of her thoughtless, happy, inconsequent youth, which had forged the links between them. He rose and began to walk the floor, his pale face distorted with passion. "My God!" he cried suddenly; "I—Allestree, is it possible that she divined the truth? That she knew me for what I was, a sham, a mockery, a whited sepulcher?"

Knowing him and the unhappy woman whose love for him had wrecked her life Allestree knew too much to speak; he was silent.

The storm of his cousin's passion rose and beat itself against the inevitable refusal of death. Poor Margaret! a few hours ago she had held the power to ruin his career, now she had slipped quietly away from him into the great Silence; the mute appeal of her unhappy love touched his very soul as it had never touched it in life; the impossibility of laying the blame for life's miseries on the dead came to him with overwhelming force, and she, who a moment before had been guilty, in his thoughts, of embarrassing his future and blighting his life, became suddenly the victim of his vanity, his idle pleasure-seeking which she had mistaken for love. He remembered, with sudden horror and self-loathing, his coldness, his bitterness toward her, and the manner in which she had received his proposal of marriage. A swift, electrifying realization of the scene tore away his selfish absorption; his manner of asking her had been almost an insult to her high-spirited pride, to her love, which had humiliated itself by the first confession on that night in the deserted ball-room where she had poured out the wretchedness of her soul. She had come to him wounded, homeless, and he had all but cast her off in his passionate selfishness, his hatred of the loveless marriage which his honor had bound him to make.

If he had only loved her, if he had but dissembled and seemed to love her! Overwhelmed with grief he searched his mind for one reassuring recollection, for one instance which should acquit him of complicity in the tragic agony of her death, but he found none. He had neglected her, denied her, tried to evade that final moment when he must ask her to be his wife, and through all she had borne with him with a sweetness unusual in her stormy nature; she had loved him well enough to make allowances, to forgive, to overlook! And now passing away from him without a word, she had left only her final kiss of forgiveness on his cheek, the wild rush of her tears at their last parting, Henceforth he should never speak to her again, never hear her voice, never

know how deeply she had suffered, never ask her forgiveness. The fact that the sequence of events was inevitable, that a woman no sooner seeks a man's love than she loses it, gave him no relief. In his own eyes he had been little short of a monster of cruelty to a dying woman because, forsooth, he loved another—younger and more beautiful!

Memory, too, tormented him with the thought of Margaret, young, sweet, confiding as she had been when he had first known her and loved her; he thought less of the moment when she broke faith and married White; her fault was less now than his; the error of a beautiful, wilful girl seemed but a little thing before the awful fact of her wrecked life, her tragic death. Through all she had really loved him, that one thing seemed certain; her spirit in all its wild, sweet waywardness had held to this one tie, her love for him, and when she had turned to him at last in her wretchedness, seeking happiness, asking it, pleading for it like a child, she had received not bread, but a stone! He knew now that no living woman could have misunderstood his coldness, his tardiness, his indifference, and in his cousin's pale and averted face he read an accusing understanding.

He threw himself into a chair again and sat staring gloomily at the floor. "What madness!" he exclaimed at last, with sudden fury; "how dared Gerty neglect her so? She was ill, weak, unprotected!"

"Gerty was no more to blame than others," Allestree observed quietly.

Fox threw back his head haughtily, and their eyes met. "I was willing to give her my life," he said bitterly. "I had no more to give!"

Allestree rose. "It is over," he replied gravely; "we cannot bring her back; come, you will go there. She would wish it, I know," he added, "and there is no one else!"

The awful finality of those words and the reproach they carried were indisputable. Fox rose with a deep groan and went out with him, without a word, to face the greatest trial of all.

XXVI

IN a little *pension* on the rue Neuve des Petits Champs Rose Temple had been working patiently at her music for six months and more, studying under one of the great Italian teachers, a man who had trained more than one prima donna and was, therefore, chary of his encouragement. The enthusiasm which she had brought to her task having been gradually dispelled by sharp disappointments, she had struggled on, determined to succeed at last.

The first test of her voice before the maestro and his French critics had been a failure, a failure so complete that she came home to weep her heart out on the faithful shoulder of the elderly cousin who was her chaperon and comforter. The weakness of a voice, beautiful but not yet fully trained, her trepidation at singing before the maestro and his assembled judges, together with the long strain of preparation, had united in her undoing. She came back to the *pension* without a word of encouragement, feeling at heart that she would never sing a note again.

She sat down, laying her head on the little writing-table, amid a wild confusion of Miss Emily Carter's pens and papers, and gave way to her despair. "I shall never sing again!" she said, "never—I'm a miserable failure; I haven't any more voice than a sparrow, and there's all that money wasted, thrown away!"

Miss Emily eyed her quietly. She had the intense family pride which is nurtured in the State of Virginia; she did not need to be told, she knew that Rose had the loveliest voice in the world. As for these nasty, little, fat, insinuating Frenchmen! She took off her spectacles and smoothed her hair back from her temples, it was done as they did hair forty years ago; it matched her immaculate turn-over lace collar and hair brooch. "You'll blot my letter, Rose," she said calmly, with a little drawl that was inimitable; "I don't see what you're crying about; it will make your nose red; as for these horrid little Parisians, they know

about as much about you as they do about heaven—which isn't enough to get there!"

In spite of herself Rose laughed feebly. "You're the most prejudiced person I know, Cousin Emily!"

"Prejudiced?" Miss Carter's nostrils quivered scornfully. "I wasn't raised within forty miles of Richmond for nothing, Rose Temple! Don't you suppose I know a gentleman when I see one? What in the world can you expect from that person, if he is a singing master? He wears a solitaire ring on his little finger and a red necktie. I reckon I've got eyes if I do wear spectacles."

"But he's trained half the great singers of the world, Cousin Emily, and at first he was so kind about my voice—today—" Rose winked back the hot tears—"today he never said a word!"

"Pig!" ejaculated Miss Carter unmoved.

Rose laughed hysterically. "I shall never sing; I'd better take to washing and ironing for a living!"

"You'd make a fortune," retorted Miss Carter ironically; "while you were mooning you'd scorch all the shirt bosoms and smash the collars."

"You're not a bit encouraging; no one is!" Rose said helplessly, leaning back in her chair. "It makes my heart ache to think of wasting poor father's money so!"

"And I reckon he'd give the whole of it to keep your little finger from hurting; he thinks you're a chip of the moon. And how in the world do you know you've wasted it yet?" continued her cousin, calmly indignant; "perhaps you didn't sing well today; is that any reason you won't tomorrow?"

Rose looked at the angular figure opposite, and the color came again slowly to her cheeks and the light to her eyes. "I'm so glad you came, Cousin Emily!" she exclaimed; "without you I should have just given up; they looked so—so indifferent, those men with their eye-glasses and their note-books and their stare."

"Stare? I should think so!" replied Miss Carter severely; "I'll put a French-

man against anything for staring. I believe myself that Paris is a Sodom and Gomorrah boiled into one, let me tell you! How any nice, sweet girl can marry one of them—Rose, if anything should ever induce me at any time to think of marrying one, clap me into an insane asylum, you hear?"

And Rose, burying her face in her hands, laughed until she cried.

But without Miss Carter and Aunt Hannah her courage would have failed her often in the months which followed. She was put back at the alphabet of music and worked with the beginners. More than one night she secretly cried herself to sleep without daring to tell Cousin Emily of her weakness. Homesickness, too, pinched her and took the color from her cheeks, but she worked bravely on. She had reached Paris in June and she had failed at her trial in September. The months which followed were crowded to the brim, and she tried to shut her heart and her ears to news from home, except that which concerned her father. The judge's letters were purposely cheerful and optimistic; he said so little about financial difficulties that it seemed like a troubled dream to Rose; she never quite realized all it meant to her future.

At last, after many months, her instructor told her one morning that he should bring some competent judges to hear her again, and if she succeeded at this second test he should try to give her a great opportunity to win her place in the world as a singer. Rose's heart thrilled. The great man said little, but at last she perceived that he believed in her in spite of her failure, that her voice had finally won his confidence. A word from him was more than a volume from another; it meant success or failure. The girl, full of her dreams of singing and redeeming all with her voice, trembled all over and turned pale. There was a great excitement at the little *pension* that night; confident though she was, Miss Carter secretly wiped away a tear, and they both worked late to give some fresh touches to the girl's white gown which brought it up to date; it was a

year old, and not made in Paris! They began to see such differences, to recognize the enchanting creations in the show-windows and out walking on the fashionable women on the boulevards.

However, Cousin Emily had her opinion about its owner's appearance in that same old white frock, and she stole out and bought a single rose for the young singer to wear the next afternoon. Aunt Hannah helped to dress her; it was a great occasion; the little flat looked as though a whirlwind had struck it, and at last the two went out in great trepidation to keep the appointment. Secretly Miss Emily longed to give those Frenchmen a piece of her mind about criticizing the voice of a sweet young girl, but she only retired discreetly to a corner and looked on with a peculiar moisture on her spectacles, which required the constant use of her handkerchief.

As Rose ceased singing and the last clear notes of her voice floated into the distances of the great, empty concert-hall, the thrill of its sweetness, its purity, its young, confident power, seemed to fill the very atmosphere of the place with exquisite music; it could not quite pass away into silence, it remained at last, if not in the ears, in the souls of the listeners, a little group to the right of the stage who had gathered there to hear the wonderful pupil, his youthful prima donna, the great gift which, he believed, the new world had for the old.

In the midst of her song she had forgotten herself, her audience, her first failure, even the world itself, while her young, ardent soul poured out its joy and its grief in those splendid notes. Love, that great interpreter of the heart, had unlocked hers to sorrow; she sang with the heart of the sorrowful; she was, first of all, as Allestree felt, an impersonation of youth, and she sang with the soul of youth which hopes forever; she loved, purely, unselfishly, gently, and she sang with the love of the world on her lips, and singing thus was supremely lovely; what matter if the old white dress was a little out of

fashion? She was a figure as symbolic of youth with its splendid hopes, its faith, its untried strength, as she was the very personification of beautiful womanhood.

No one spoke, no one applauded, but not an eye was dry.

But to Rose, whose ears were not filled with her own music, the silence which followed it came with a shock of terrible revulsion. She waited a moment in keen suspense, but no one spoke, no one moved; the wave of silence that followed the wave of sound engulfed her hopes, she remembered that first disappointment. Bitter dismay swept over her, she turned away to hide her emotion, but the maestro crossed the stage at that instant and held out his hand; he could not praise her, but there was actually a tear in his eye.

Rose looked up, and reading his face burst into tears of joy, her hopes suddenly fulfilled.

Then the party of judges broke out with a round of applause and one little Frenchman, with a polished pink bald head and mustaches, shouted: "Brava!"

In the end they crowded around her and overwhelmed her with compliments; they were eager to invite her to a supper and drink her health in champagne, but the staid Virginia cousin, in the old-fashioned black bonnet and the old black alpaca gown which outraged Paris without hiding the good heart beneath it, frowned on this hilarity; her deep-seated suspicion of the Parisians in general had not been dissipated by this burst of applause. She insisted that Rose, who was trembling with excitement and the strain of the long hours of training, should go straight back to their little apartment to rest. A decision too full of wisdom for even Rose, eager though she was for the sweet meed of praise, to resist it.

They drove back in a fiacre, a wild extravagance which they ventured in view of the great success and the immediate prospects of a fortune; the cousin felt that they were immediate.

"You all were always talented," she said to Rose, as they drove down the

rue de Rivoli; "your mother could do anything; we always said so. Cousin Sally Carter, too, is going to be an artist, and no one ever made preserves like Cousin Anna's! I reckon it's in the family, Rose."

"Oh, Cousin Emily!" Rose sighed, and hid her face on the alpaca shoulder, "oh, if I can only, only sing so well that there shall be no more terrible trouble for father!"

"Now, don't you worry about the judge, child," Cousin Emily replied soothingly; "it will all come out right, and, anyway, the best families haven't money nowadays!" she added with ineffable disdain; "it's very vulgar."

"I think I'd risk having it, though!" Rose said, with a sigh.

She was really in a dream. The softness of Spring was in the atmosphere as they drove through the gay streets, and all the trees in the Garden of the Tuileries were delicately fringed with green; the voices of children, the sounds of laughter, now and then a snatch of song, reminded them that it was a holiday. Rose thought of home; the Persian lilac must be budding, the tulip-trees, of course, were in flower; a pang of homesickness seized her, a longing to see the old house again—ah, there was the sorrow of it, could they keep the old house much longer? With these thoughts came others deeply perturbed, which she tried to thrust away. She knew of Margaret's sudden death, but she had heard but little of it, of Fox nothing. Her father's letters excluded the whole matter; Mrs. Allestree's were chary in mention of it, and from Robert there was no word on the subject. Gerty English, strangely enough, had not written since Margaret's death, and Rose could only piece together the dim outlines of a tragedy which touched her to the soul. There had been moments when she had been bitter against poor Margaret, had held her responsible; now she thought of her with pity.

As these things floated before her in a confused dream of sorrow and regret, she was scarcely conscious of Cousin Emily's chatter or of the streets through which they passed, but present-

ly they were set down at their own door and she paid the cabman; Cousin Emily's French was excellent, but it belonged exclusively to the classroom and the phrase-book, and no one in Paris understood it, a fact which bewildered her more than any of her other experiences.

They found the *pension* disturbed by a fire in an adjoining house, and Aunt Hannah was sitting on top of Rose's trunk with her bonnet on, waiting to be assured that the flames could not reach her.

"It's all out, Aunt Hannah," Rose assured her, laughing; "the concierge says it was out half an hour ago."

"He don' know nuthin' about it, Miss Rose; he ain't sure dat he's a liar, an' I knows he is, bekase I'se caught him at it," the old woman replied firmly; "de place might be afire sure nuff. It was one ob dem 'lection wires dat set de odder house off, an' dis place is full ob dem; I don' tole him ter cut 'em loose, an' he keep on jabberin' like a monkey; I ain't got no manner ob use fo' dese French people no-ways!"

"Nor has Cousin Emily!" laughed Rose, taking off her hat and tossing it to Aunt Hannah, while she passed her hand over her bright hair with a light, deft touch which seemed to bring every ripple into a lovelier disorder; "the poor concierge is a good soul, and he does make us comfortable here."

"Mebbe he is, an' mebbe he ain't!" said Aunt Hannah grudgingly; "dese men-folks allus waits on a pretty girl, honey, but I 'lows he'd cheat yo' jest the same; I'se got my eye on him sure!"

"I wish you'd take off your bonnet and get my trunk open," retorted Rose good-naturedly; "then we'll see if we can put the concierge in it—if he misbehaves!"

"My sakes, honey, I done clean forgot ter gib yo' dis letter; it's a telegram, I reckon; it come jest befo' de fire broke out, an' I'se been settin' on it ter keep it safe."

It was a cablegram, and Rose stretched out an eager hand for it with a thrill of anticipation; it seemed as if her father must be reaching out to her

across the seas, that he already knew and rejoiced with her for surely all his prejudices would dissolve at the assurance of her success.

She opened it with trembling fingers, a smile on her lips. It fluttered and fell to the floor; it was a cablegram to summon her home. The judge was very ill.

XXVII

AFTERWARD Rose never quite knew how she endured the voyage home. Her love for her father was so deep, so tender, they were so bound together by a hundred ties not only of affection but of sympathy and tastes and interests, that the very thought of losing him almost broke her down. It took both Cousin Emily Carter and old black Aunt Hannah to comfort and sustain her during those ten days.

But when she reached Washington, Allestree met her at the station with good tidings; the judge was out of danger. He had been very near death and came back slowly from the Valley of the Shadow. However, he had come back, and Rose knelt beside his bed and cried her heart out with joy to feel his arm around her. How pale and thin and wasted he looked! He had aged so much; poor Rose, she saw it and forced a smile to disguise it even to herself. But he was unaware of the shock which the sight of him gave her, and he forgot his illness in his eager interest in her account of Paris and her final success. She told him very little of those long months of struggle and depression, of the thousand little pinches and trials that they had been through to keep from asking an extra penny from him.

After Rose came the judge began to mend more rapidly; old Mrs. Allestree said he had only been pining away for the child, but she knew better, being a wise old woman. She knew that the judge had been struggling all the year to stave off the foreclosure of the mortgage on the old house which he and Rose loved so well. She knew, too, that he had almost failed when that

mysterious arrangement was made for him by an unknown party; the message came that the mortgage had been taken up, and he could have all the time he wanted and at a lower rate of interest.

This news, so amazing and so unprecedented, had been synchronous with the judge's breakdown and had, Mrs. Allestree believed, contributed to it. The sudden relief had snapped the strain on his nerves, and he slipped down into a state of coma. However, she did not tell Rose this, nor her suspicions, which were fast becoming certainties, about the mortgage; she only kissed her affectionately and made her sing to her the song which had won such an ovation from the French critics, and which Cousin Emily Carter had described with enthusiasm before she departed to the Tidewater region, where she hoped to cut her own asparagus bed and set out her flowers undisturbed by Parisian manners and customs.

Allestree welcomed Rose with even greater relief than his mother and the judge, but wisdom had taught him to rejoice in silence, and he did so, being careful, however, to send promptly for her portrait, which, according to the agreement between Mrs. Allestree and the judge, could not be loaned during Rose's presence in the house, but only as a consolation in her absence. But the judge sighed deeply when they told him it had been returned to the studio again.

It was during the first days of her father's convalescence that Rose found Margaret's letter to her among his papers; not knowing Rose's address in Paris, Margaret had sent it in the judge's care, and he had overlooked it when he forwarded the letters, as he did once a week. By a strange accident it had slipped under some pamphlets in the basket on his library-table and lay there until Rose, rearranging his papers one morning, came upon it and, recognizing the writing, broke the seal with some trepidation, for Margaret had never been an intimate correspondent, and Rose divined some serious reason

for this long, closely written letter. She was alone when she found it, and she went to the open window and stood there reading it.

Margaret, moved by the deep sorrow and passion which had swept over her poor troubled soul in those last days of her life, had poured out her heart. She told Rose all; that she had come between her and Fox; in her wild and covetous jealousy she had thought to wrest happiness from despair; to keep his love she had been willing to lose all, and she had lost! She concealed nothing, the last pitiful words of the letter, a remarkable letter of passion and grief and self-sacrifice, told Rose that she was going to give up her life to her children and try to live down her desertion of them.

Rose read it through to the end, and then covered her face with her hands, trying to shut out the terrifying picture that it had unconsciously drawn of a woman, desolate, shipwrecked, without hope in earth or heaven. The terrors which had possessed Margaret's soul swept over hers. All that Mrs. Allestree had told her, and that Gerty, poor, voluble, good-hearted Gerty, had enlarged upon, filled out the scene. The lonely walk, the visit to the studio, the unfriended and miserable death; she did not know of those other scenes in the church and the curiosity-shop where Margaret had found her heart, but she did know of a strange girl who had brought a single white lily to lay in Margaret's dead hand and gone away weeping bitterly.

She had blamed poor Margaret, judged her; Rose felt it at that moment and accused herself of heartlessness; of Fox she dared not think. In the new light which this letter shed on the situation she began to understand how cruelly he had been placed, and there, too, she had judged!

Poor Rose—her father had inculcated stern and simple lessons, and she had tried, before all things, to be just; but to be judicious and calm and in love at the same time was an impossible combination. She dashed the tears from her eyes and thrust Mar-

garet's letter into her pocket, and went about her duties with the air of a soldier on guard, but her lip would quiver at intervals and she could not sing a note when the judge asked for one of the old ballads that he had loved as a boy, and Rose had learned, to please him.

It was about this time that she began to wonder if the old house must go, or if her father had been able to meet all the payments due upon it. She dared not ask him, and he said nothing, but she noticed, now that he was able to be moved into the library every day, and sometimes into the garden in the warm Spring sunshine, that he sat for hours at a time in a brown study with a deep furrow between his brows, and was constantly pushing back his hair from his forehead, as he did in moments of perplexity. She was afraid to speak, lest any mention of the trouble which had so beset him would bring back the fever and a relapse, so she had to content herself with hope and waited for some sign on his part.

The old house had never seemed so dear; the mantling vines were full out in new foliage, birds were nested on the southern wall toward the garden, and the old garden-plot itself, so sheltered and secluded by the house and the high brick wall which shut out the street, was just coming into bloom. The roses she had set out the Spring before were in bud, and the peonies were blooming. Rose looked about her with a sigh and forgot that she would, perhaps, be one day a great prima donna with the world at her feet. Such things do not always fill a woman's heart.

Meanwhile the judge had written and despatched a letter with great secrecy, and one morning, after he was wheeled into his library, he told Rose that she might take her sewing into the garden, for he expected a gentleman on business and he might be there half an hour. She obeyed him with a stifling sensation of anxiety; she knew it was that mortgage, that terrible mortgage, and his reticence convinced her that he was concealing bad news from her. She took her sewing out to the little arbor

in the corner, where the library windows were out of sight, and she tried to sew, but her fingers trembled so that she lost her needle and, having neglected to provide herself with another, she sat and watched the robin on the lawn and wished money grew up like grass out of the well-tilled earth and was of as little consequence. Yet, all the while, it was not of herself she thought but of her father, broken in health, old and careworn, facing those inexorable obligations without even her help.

The judge alone in the library watched the clock with an anxious eye, and thought of Rose and all it would mean to her if he could save the property. When he lay near death the one overwhelming horror of his heart had been to leave her at the mercy of the world. The old man glanced about him with the same fond recognition of familiar objects; it is strange how these dear inanimate things, which were here before we came and will be here when we are gone, become so valuable to us. To the judge they had associations. The picture over the mantel had been bought by his grandfather, those books dated still farther back in the family; the clock had belonged to his mother's great-grandfather, the old secretary of polished mahogany, with secret drawers and brass mountings, was an heirloom—it had held a will which had nearly disrupted the family two generations back. Small matters, but to an old man inexpressibly interesting and sacred. Of the house he did not like to think; that was full of memories of his wife, and he could not now explain the madness which had led him to mortgage it to pay off more pressing claims which had followed his first heavy losses.

XXVIII

ROSE had been ten minutes in the garden and the judge was beginning to fidget in his chair when he heard the front door open and shut and at last steps came toward the library. A moment later William Fox entered the room. As he came into the mellow

light from the open window the judge was struck by the change in his strong, pale face. The old smile which had come so easily to his lips, and which, at times, had almost the sweetness of a woman's, was gone; the brow and chin had a new resolution. The man was changed. Judge Temple saw it and held out his hand with a sudden impulse of warmer sympathy than he had felt before. After all, Fox had met it like a man and paid the cost.

On his side Fox was as strongly affected by the broken appearance of the old man in his invalid chair with his white head and his sunken eyes. "My dear judge," he said, "I hope you're feeling better? I was glad to obey your summons, though I'm not sure that I understand the reference in your note."

The judge looked at him a moment in silence, then drawing a letter from his pocket, opened it and handed it to him. Fox took it with evident reluctance; as he read it he colored a little and folding it hastily, handed it back without a word.

"I did not know until yesterday, sir, to whom I was indebted," Judge Temple said slowly, his lip trembling slightly from weakness and profound emotion.

Fox stirred uneasily in his chair, his color deepening. "I didn't intend you to know it at all, judge," he said, almost with an air of diffidence; "I presume I owe my betrayal to Berkman. However, I want to assure you—since it is known—that you can have all the time you desire; I consider it a good investment!"

The judge's spectacles grew misty and he took them off hurriedly and wiped them, his thin hands shaking as he did it. "I thank you for your confidence," he said quietly, when he could speak; "you'll get it—every cent."

"I know it. I tell you I consider it a good investment, the best I ever made," Fox retorted, smiling; "I'm not usually so judicious in my ventures."

The old man tried to force an answering smile, but he failed, his head sank on his breast and his hands, lying on the

carved arms of his great chair, still trembled. Fox looked at him in some anxiety, half afraid that the excitement and relief had been too much, and bitterly indignant that his secret had been betrayed. It had been a difficult matter for him to take up the mortgage, for he was by no means a rich man, but he had vowed in his heart to save Rose her home, the home that he knew she loved so well, and half the joy of doing it had been to do it without her knowledge; but it seemed impossible to keep a secret which, from its very nature, must be shared with others.

The change in the old face opposite was alarmingly sharp.

"My dear judge, you are too indisposed for business; let me ring for assistance," Fox exclaimed with real concern.

But the judge protested. "Sir, I'm better today than I have been for a year," he said, a slight break in his voice; "I see my way clear. I'll be able to save this property, I—" He broke off and passed his handkerchief over his eyes; there was a moment's painful silence, then he held out his hand. "God bless you, Fox!" he broke out suddenly; "it was killing me to lose it——"

They shook hands. Fox had risen and his face was colorless. "Don't tell her, judge," he said abruptly.

The old man started and was about to speak, but meeting the other's eye, refrained. Many things came into his mind, among them a memory of Rose's face at Mrs. O'Neal's ball. It was a bitter moment; no man was good enough for her, and this man had been too much talked about! Yet the child's happiness was near his heart.

With a certain reluctance Fox turned at last to go, and as he did so his glance passed through the open window into the garden. "I can reach the gate by this path, can I not?" he asked, moving toward it.

The judge started uneasily, with an involuntary gesture as if to detain him, to keep him back at any cost, but Fox did not see it and the old man sank

back in his chair quiescent. His lips moved, but he said nothing; after all, had he a right to interfere? Unconsciously the younger man went out of the window and down the two short steps to the gravel path.

The judge watched him disappear behind the Persian lilac with a fascinated eye. Then he took out his handkerchief again, and passing it swiftly across his brow pushed back his scant white hair until it seemed to rise up in active protest. The glare of the May sunshine suddenly hurt his gaze, and he shook out his handkerchief and threw it over his head, closing his eyes.

Aunt Hannah, opening the door a moment later, with a pleasant jingle of ice in the mint-julep glass on her tray, peeped in, thought him asleep and cautiously and discreetly closed the door again. "Fo' de Lord," she murmured, "ef it ain't de fust time dat he didn't kinder seen dat de julep was comin'; I reckon he's right po'ly!"

Fox turned the corner by the lilac, walking slowly, holding his hat behind his back, his bare head bowed. His face was gloomy with thought, and he almost passed the arbor. At the turn a glint of white caught his eye and he looked up quickly and saw Rose industriously sewing without a needle, her head down over her work and the sunshine filtering through a trellis of vines on her soft bright hair and her white gown.

He came toward her with an exclamation of unrestrained joy, but as their eyes met a wave of mutual feeling swept over their souls and left them mute. Between them seemed to lie the sorrow and the love of that beautiful and unfortunate woman who had separated them. The language of conventionality was no longer possible; Rose tried to speak, but her words died in an inarticulate murmur. The anguish of Margaret's letter came back to her; it had saved Fox in her eyes; she no longer condemned him, she no longer felt it a duty to avoid him, but she found it impossible to tell him of the change in her heart by any common-

place word of friendship. Her hand had slipped from his eager grasp and lay trembling on her work. It was terrible to betray herself so; her cheek reddened and tears of mortification came into her eyes. But to speak to him of common things at such a moment—how could she? And he made no effort to help her, but only watched her, his soul in his eyes. The marks of suffering on his face touched her, too; the lines had sharpened, the gaze deepened and become more introspective, the shock of primitive passions had really decentralized his life. He smiled at the sight of her, almost the old eager smile, but even that light had died out of his face now, and in the pause she seemed to hear her own heart beating against her breast.

He stood looking at her. "How long must I be silent?" he asked at last.

Rose busied herself in a fruitless attempt to thread an imaginary needle, and her slender fingers shook. It had been in her mind to tell him that Margaret had written her, but as he spoke a sudden intuition of the truth arrested her impulse, a flood of light poured in upon her, illuminating the twilight of her thought. She felt that he must not only never know of Margaret's confession—she had not meant to tell him that—but not even of her letter. It was impossible to answer him; her lips were tremulous as she looked up and met his grave, compelling gaze. In her look, so full of buoyant and beautiful youth, there was not even the shadow of reproach. Her simplicity, her renewal of confidence in him, were profoundly touching, the bitterness and humiliation of the past months seemed at last sanctified by her forbearance. The secret agony which had torn his heart during the long Winter fell away from the present; it belonged at once to the past, sinking into that long vista which leads into oblivion. Today was beautiful and strong with hope.

Before her youth and purity William Fox experienced a feeling of sudden and complete humility. "Can you forgive me?" he asked in a low voice.

Margaret's letter seemed to breathe

its message in her ears. "There's nothing to forgive," Rose said simply.

"You understand?" there was passionate eagerness in his glance; his love for her was sweeping away the obstacles from his mind, leaping up again to demand its right to exist.

"Yes," Rose said with white lips, "I understand, not fully—but——"

"And now?" he was strongly moved; not knowing whose hand had lifted the veil of her misunderstanding and far from divining the truth.

"And now?" The tears gathered in her eyes and fell unheeded; "I cannot but think of her love—her unhappiness!"

"And you still blame me?" Fox stood motionless, his face resuming its stern reserve.

Rose shook her head. "I—I cannot!" she murmured, remembering that confession, and the thought of it sealing her lips.

He started, the color rushing to his temples, the kindling passion of his glance transforming him. "Rose!"

She looked up through her tears, and as suddenly hid her face in her hands. "I am afraid!" she murmured brokenly; "out of—of all this sorrow can there be happiness?"

Fox sat down beside her and gently took her hand. "You mean you cannot trust me?" he asked soberly.

For a moment she did not answer. He looked down at her drooping profile, the lovely arch of her brow, the soft cheek and chin; her eyes no longer met his. "Or is it that you do not love me?" he said quietly.

She raised her head at that, and the dawning sweetness of her glance illumined his soul. "It is because I love you—that I can no longer judge!" she faltered, with trembling lips.

He met her look without a word; language, for the moment, had no significance for them.

Silence, filled with the sweet murmur of Summer life, the fragrance of flowers, the audible rustling of the magnolia leaves, seemed to enfold them in a new and beautiful world.



EXPRESSION

By Philip Becker Goetz

MY quiet friend in you breeds dumb despair,
You think him dull in his serenity;
Look up into the cloudless, noonday sky—
How long deceive yourself no stars are there?



THE HAPPY FAMILY

MRS. SCRAPPINGTON—Well, what are you muttering about?

MR. SCRAPPINGTON—You accepted me after I had proposed to you four times, didn't you?

"Yes."

"Served me right, confound my fool soul!"

"LOVE ME, LOVE MY DOG"

By Emery Pottle

"CAN'T you do *something*, doctor, *something*, the leastest little something for my precious love-bird?" sobbed Mrs. Fitts asthmatically, sinking, with an agonized creak of her stays, to her knees.

Dr. Nosworthy, a large, red, shining gentleman, not unlike a new beefsteak, with a certain moistness of personality which seemed to give, unfortunately, a soiled and somewhat untidy aspect to his garments, ran his fingers desperately through the long, sparse filaments of hair stuck neatly across his skull—he immediately repaired the damage he thus wrought, for any such disarrangement, he well knew, brilliantly displayed his baldness. "Madam," he averred, with a pompous sigh, "all that science and medical skill *can* do for your—your"—he disliked to say dog—"your—little companion is being *done*."

Further questions in the face of this epitome of the admirable doctor's professional efforts seemed impertinent. Mrs. Fitts turned tremulously to the other member of the group surrounding the afflicted patient. "James, you don't think Fidsie will *die*—do you, James?"

James Pink, his mild, round face screwed into a little distorted knot of utmost compassion, hopping nervously about in the abandon of his distress—rabbit-wise—stepped with some violence on Dr. Nosworthy's toes. "Very stupid," he cried, "very stupid, indeed, oh, very stupid!"

"Good God, man," naturally objected the skilful veterinary.

"James, how can you!" and Mrs. Fitts broke down pathetically. "Stupid! Fidsie's death-bed stupid!"

"Oh, my dear," protested the fairly hysterical Mr. Pink, "I mean, my dear Henrietta—stupid! Stupid! No, no, no! It is most exciting—most entertaining! At least, I do not mean that—I mean—I mean——"

"Oh, James Pink," Mrs. Fitts gasped in the sacred indignation of grief, "you are a perfect brute! My own darling Fidsie's last sickness *entertaining!*" She seemed to melt into a large, soft mass on the floor.

Dr. Nosworthy frowned majestically at the offensive Pink. "Man, can't you respect a good woman's grief?" he demanded in an unwieldy utterance deep in his throat. "Madam, there is yet some hope."

The inconsequent agitation of James Pink was pathetic to behold. The renewed ebullitions of his distress caused him to bound hither and thither in a recklessness of elasticity most alarming.

"Henrietta," he moaned, "I beg—I implore—I beseech—little Fidsie—oh, my heart bleeds with yours, Henrietta—little Fidsie!" He got to his knees with feverish intensity. "Fidsie! Good Fidsie! Fidsie—see James, Fidsie! James, James Pink, Fidsie."

The genuineness of his sorrow was apparent even to the overwrought Mrs. Fitts, and she feebly put a hand on Mr. Pink's volatile arm. "How we have loved him—little Fidsie—haven't we, James?"

"As if he were our own child," instantly replied James Pink with unthinking sympathy. The words were not yet cold on his lips when their glaring indelicacy smote him. "I mean—I mean—" he gurgled blushing.

At this moment, mercifully for Mr. Pink, the prostrate Fidsie—an affectionate shortening of the more dignified Fidelio—stirred weakly on his pillow and cast a dimming eye on his mistress. The heartsick lady, with a remarkable effort, assisted by Dr. Nosworthy, impelled herself near enough to lift the tiny paw of Fidsie and kiss it. But while she was in the very affecting instant of the caress, the dog's little body stiffened, gasped, and lay still, forever unresponsive to earthly endearments. The man of science laid his hand on Fidelio's heart. It was still. With profound solemnity he touched Mrs. Fitts.

"It is over," he murmured throatily. "Even science could not combat the laws of nature here."

James Pink, with tears in his eyes, caught Mrs. Fitts as she swooned. Caught, I say? Propped would more accurately describe his gentle act. He wedged his slight body between Mrs. Fitts's shoulders and the floor—on any other occasion but this a position most unhappy. Indeed, when Dr. Nosworthy raised—at the expense of much of his very considerable strength—the grief-stricken woman and dragged her to a near-by couch Mr. Pink was fain to lie for some moments supine before he could summon energy for further ministration.

"It is indeed a sad day for her—for us all, I may say, doctor," he twittered, fluttering over Mrs. Fitts with his handkerchief and birdie's bath of water, which he had, with surprising cool-headedness, snatched from the canary's cage.

Dr. Nosworthy emitted a kind of growl. Mr. Pink's prompt treatment had its effect—Mrs. Fitts shivered through her bulk and opened her eyes. The sight of the stark Fidsie sent her off again, and again she recovered.

"Leave me—leave me alone," she besought them tearfully. "Fidsie and me have been together in life always, and I'll watch now with him."

This—and very appropriately—so touched James Pink that he skipped to Mrs. Fitts and kissed her hand. Dr. Nosworthy shone with a compassion

that fairly glittered on his brow and cheek. "All that science could do—" he essayed.

She waved them from her faintly. They went out—the doctor with a muffled tread that shook the very walls of Mrs. Fitts's cottage, James Pink bounding softly as a child's rubber-ball.

"A woman's grief," he remarked when they were once more in the fresh air of the street, "is a sad thing to see."

"I've got a dog myself," replied Dr. Nosworthy with less inconsequence than would at first appear.

"I hope she is well," politely, though absently, responded Mr. Pink. "A woman is God's lovely gift to the home."

"I said a *dog*," coughed Dr. Nosworthy irritatedly.

"I—I mean—a—a dog—a—God's lovely gift to the home," stammered Mr. Pink.

The doctor diagnosed him with medical contempt. Mr. Pink writhed helplessly. After a considerable silence of a distinctly disagreeable nature, during which Dr. Nosworthy imponderably stared into space, he gave forth with creative impressiveness:

"She is a noble woman."

Mr. Pink was in such a state of inner discomposure that his brain failed to perform its wonted function of association. "Ah, your dog? Yes, yes, oh, yes. A lovely gift——"

Dr. Nosworthy stopped short and glared at his perturbed companion.

"Sir," he breathed stertorously, "you are either a maniac or an ass!" and with this he disappeared down a side street, leaving James Pink in such an agony of crimson bewilderment that it was not until several hours afterward he recovered sufficiently to be righteously angry.

It was a May morning when the tragic event just narrated took place, and James Pink, happening to pass the dwelling of Mrs. Fitts during his matutinal walk, and happening likewise to drop in to inquire after her health, had become a harrowed participant in the death scene of Fidsie. When evening of that same day overshadowed the

peaceful village and, so Mr. Pink piously hoped, brought with it a healing balm to wounded hearts, he took his way again through the darkening quietude of streets to the bereaved home. It was, he had to confess, something of a relief not to find on the handle of the door-bell the dreary emblem of *crêpe*, for he had had a haunting premonition that so might the extravagance of grief work upon Mrs. Fitts she would go to unwarrantable lengths of woe. However, she met him herself clad in somber black and spoke with a depressing hushed consciousness of voice.

In a praiseworthy but tactless effort to express his complete sympathy Mr. Pink, hesitating in the doorway, sighed unaffectedly, "Ah, Henrietta, how often little Fidsie used to meet me at the door and growl and bite at my leg."

It was too much for Mrs. Fitts. Her chastened composure forsook her and in the wildest burst of tears her grief flooded forth. "James—J-J-James—how could you r-r-remind me! And once he t-tore the cunningest hole in your t-trousers!"

With considerable difficulty Mr. Pink led her to a seat upon the sofa and was compelled to chafe her wrists frantically—till they looked quite raw—before she recovered. His subsequent tentative conversational efforts to divert the stricken lady's mind met with so diametrically opposite an effect—even an innocent reflection on the beauty of the May evening recalling to Mrs. Fitts how Fidsie had adored the Maytime—that he was reduced ultimately to a silent, subdued attitude of folded hands and neatly crossed feet, in which, with his trim little head drooping sorrowfully to one side like Cock Robin, he emanated influences of condolence.

"Mercy, James," presently said Mrs. Fitts with lugubrious impatience, "why don't you say something?—leaving a body all alone to her sad thoughts!"

"I had hoped that my presence might be something of a comfort," meekly offered Mr. Pink.

Mrs. Fitts took this gloomily. "Noth-

ing will ever be to me what Fidsie was," she breathed reprovingly.

"No—no—no," eagerly assented Mr. Pink, "but if I—I—Henrietta—if I could—another companion—a—a—a solace in your—loneliness. If I could——"

His friend eyed him indignantly. "James Pink, are you proposing to bring me another dog—and Fidsie lying *cold* and *stiff* and *dead* in this very house at this very minute! Oh, ain't men heartless brutes!"

James Pink shivered. "Oh, Henrietta," he murmured ineptly, "cold and stiff and dead! Dear me, dear me! Here in the house? Dear me—dear me!"

"Was you?" sternly interrogated Mrs. Fitts.

"Cold and stiff and dead, Henrietta? Never, I never was!"

"You know what I mean, James! I mean was you speaking of bringing another dog here?"

"God bless me, no!" cried Mr. Pink, aghast. "How terrible, Henrietta! I was—I was—speaking of—of myself—as a comforter—a—a-companion."

Mrs. Fitts allowed herself to be appeased. "I don't want any more companions," she asserted tearfully. "'Twas a terrible day when poor Samuel Fitts left me a widow, and 'tis a terrible day when I am left——"

"Childless," sighed Mr. Pink quite inaudibly.

Mrs. Fitts did not catch the word. "Left alone without Fidsie. I don't know which of the two trials was the hardest to bear."

Mr. Pink made a show of profound meditation. "They are both severe afflictions," he presently remarked, "and I don't know that I can say which is worst. I have—ah—as you know, never been—a—oh—dog—a doggie——"

"You don't know what you've been," interrupted Mrs. Fitts mysteriously. "I was reading in a paper the other day that we was monkeys once."

Mr. Pink's countenance expressed extreme revulsion at this succinct note on evolution. But he continued mild-

ly, "I have no recollection of having been a—ah—doggie.—"

"I prefer dogs to men, myself," darkly punctuated Mrs. Fitts.

"Nor, I may say, a husband!" James Pink paused to regain equilibrium.

"Well, what of it?" said his companion shortly.

He had not anticipated this. "Why, Henrietta, why, why—nothing of it. I—I mean I—I have always hoped to be—ah—a doggie—I mean a husband." He was extremely upset.

Mrs. Fitts regarded him dispassionately. "Dogs are less trouble."

Mr. Pink blushed, and on the impact of this expert opinion retired into modest silence.

Presently Mrs. Fitts arose and beckoned to her guest. "James, do you want to *see* him?" she wheezed in a sepulchral whisper.

Mr. Pink's spine crinkled; he had a horror of death in any form. He temporized therefore. "*See* him?"

"Fidsie—he's in the parlor."

Before James Pink could master his unfortunate sense of repulsion, his friend led him into the parlor—a damp, melancholy retreat at best. In the centre of the room, reposing on his cushion on a marble-topped table, lay the small remains of Fidsie, covered with a white cloth. This cloth Mrs. Fitts, with some pride, removed, and with a lamp in one hand drew, with the other, the reluctant Pink to nearer view. She sniffled affectingly. "My lamb!"

James Pink, rooted to the bier, as one under a dreadful hypnotic influence gazed glassily. "Ah," he sighed, "where is he now?"

"Astral plane," answered Mrs. Fitts promptly.

"Where?" he inquired again uncertainly.

"*Astral plane.*"

"Yes—yes—quite so. But—ah—where is the—ah—place you mention?"

Mrs. Fitts gestured vaguely in the direction of Pink. "Here—everywhere."

Mr. Pink suppressed an instinctive chattering of teeth. "How strange!"

"Not at all," said Mrs. Fitts sternly. "Oh!"

The bereaved lady moved to a small-er table which stood by the funereal couch. "Oh, James," she whimpered, "here's his little things. I put 'em all beside him. Ain't it sad?"

Mr. Pink was by this time in a state of nervous emotion so poignant and overpowering that he felt he could bear little more. He watched fascinatedly Mrs. Fitts lift up the possessions of the late Fidelio.

"Here's his little Spring overcoat," she proceeded mournfully, "with the little wee pocket in it and the wee, wee pocket-handkerchief in that! Ain't it sad?"

Mr. Pink nodded.

"And here's his little fur-lined Winter ulster—handkerchief—lace-edged—right here, too. Oh, it *is* sad, ain't it, James?"

Again James nodded hopelessly.

"And here's his ball and his doll and his cane and his set of dishes and his brush and comb—*oh, James!*"

She gave way completely and sobbed with such abandon that Mr. Pink was obliged to take the careening lamp from her hands. When she had somewhat recovered—her pain rent Pink's sensitive soul—her companion coughed apologetically and essayed a practical remark.

"When is the—oh—when are the obsequies, Henrietta?"

Mrs. Fitts sank heavily into a chair near Fidsie. "James, I can't let that dog be put under the cold, horrid ground."

"But—but—Henrietta—" Mr. Pink was appalled at this new development.

"You needn't to talk. I say I can't, and I *can't*."

He wiped his cold brow. "My dear Henrietta—"

"No, no, James! 'Tain't no use! I can't let 'em put him in the ground—the nasty ground." She wept noisily.

Mr. Pink tried to wring his hands, but finding the lamp therein wrung that. "But, Henrietta, my dear friend, you—you—ah, I can't leave him on top of the ground!"

"Don't I know it?"

"The—ah—decompo—" delicately attempted Mr. Pink.

"Don't you say that nasty word about Fidsie?"

"Cremation?" Mr. Pink offered fearfully.

"Horrid!"

In his extremity Mr. Pink was well-nigh exhausted. The embarrassing complication which confronted him was of seeming insolubility. What guardian power it was that sparked his flagging wits at the instant he never knew, but as an inspiration he whispered eagerly, "Why not have him *stuffed*, Henrietta!"

The first ray of joy that had illuminated Mrs. Fitts's somber face appeared, as April sunshine. "James Pink, the very thing! I wonder I hadn't thought of it. Fidsie, stuffed! How cute he'd look on the little stand in front of the window—and I'd always have him near me. Poor Samuel Fitts—they put him in the cold ground——"

"Yes, yes—but, pardon me, Henrietta, I—I never heard of a—I mean—a—a stuffed husband." Mr. Pink's voice was of a shocked timbre.

Mrs. Fitts eyed him coldly. "Who'd want one?" she asked tartly. "Though many of 'em are no better than that," she added cynically, "to my mind."

This Mr. Pink could not combat. He returned to the more pleasing topic of taxidermy, his heart warm with the effulgence of a tender desire. "Henrietta," he began gently, "as one who—ah—loved Fidsie, and as one who—ah—loves—I mean—esteems you as a remarkable woman, I ask this of you——"

Mrs. Fitts gave him her melancholy eyes.

"Let me have Fidsie stuffed and give him to you as a—token—a—a—a—Oh, I should love to, Henrietta!"

Mrs. Fitts considered long and deeply. At last she smiled the faint smile of spent sorrow. "It shall be as you wish, James, if, as you say, you loved my little one so."

Mr. Pink—who, it is sad to recount, had for ten years cherished a bitter dislike of Fidelio, and who for love of the

dog's mistress had painfully concealed his antipathy—did not now hesitate to add the last stone to his edifice of falsehood. "Like a child I loved him, Henrietta."

Mrs. Fitts sighed. "I believe you, James; you are a good man." She slowly approached the corpse. Mr. Pink turned his back on the final farewells. What took place he never knew. But when it was over Mrs. Fitts assumed a brisker air. "Well, James, what's going to be done had better be done quick. It's May and the days are getting warmer and——"

"Precisely," hurried out Mr. Pink, loth to hear the conclusion. "I had thought, just now, if I could—ah—take little Fidsie—with—ah—me—to-night—? Then tomorrow I would carry him to a taxidermist in the city and——"

Mrs. Fitts nodded comprehendingly.

It is not fitting to dwell on the details of what subsequently occurred. The parting of Mrs. Fitts from her pet is a subject not lightly to be bandied about from lip to lip. Suffice it to say that at an hour close on midnight, when the village slept profoundly, James Pink emerged from the home of Mrs. Fitts bearing in his arms the dead Fidsie, stiff and stark, clad in his little fur-lined ulster. Crushing back his loathing of the burden he bore, our friend scuttled through back alleys and side streets in a passion of dread, and at last gained grateful entrance to his own innocent cottage, feeling like Eugene Aram—and all this for love of Mrs. Fitts. It might be added that the ghastly presence of Fidsie in his house rendered the night sickeningly awful to Mr. Pink, so that he slept but little and then only to dream frightfully of himself as a stuffed husband, perched on Mrs. Fitts's little table before the window.

Before the ghostly dawn had scarcely peered wanly into his simple chamber James Pink, haggard of face as the dawn itself, arose from his dismal bed and prepared for his journey to the nearest city. While yet in his night-clothes he put on a pair of gloves, and

retiring to a rude addition to his dwelling, known as the "wood-shed," he proceeded, albeit with an intensity of disgust hardly to be imagined, to pack Fidsie neatly into an old valise—filling in the interstices with shavings and odd bits of newspaper. This detestable duty over, he returned to his own more dignified pursuits, and, in ample time, set out to catch the six o'clock train. It was so early that no one was yet astir, save the milkman and one or two others of like early vocations. James Pink was venturing to congratulate himself on his avoidance of all humankind, when he ran full into Dr. Nosworthy emerging from a stable, where it happened he had been called betimes to minister unto a sick horse.

Mr. Pink, quite disconcerted at the adventure, in the excitement of butting heavily into Dr. Nosworthy with both his valises, dropped that one containing Fidsie. It struck unpleasantly upon the earth.

Dr. Nosworthy, being out of temper owing to his early vigil, swore, it is distressing to say, most profanely, and kicked at the fallen bag. Mr. Pink emitted a groan of horror at the sound of the heavy boot coming in contact with the thin leather that enclosed his burden. Besides, he had cherished, ever since the advent of the skilful veterinary into the community—a month since—a peculiar hatred for the doctor; and this unworthy emotion had decidedly increased since yesterday's encounter.

"You're a brute, sir," Mr. Pink cried impetuously, "a brute, sir, to kick a helpless dog!"

"Dog—dog—dog?" retorted the irate man of science. "Dog? Where's a dog?"

"I mean—a—a helpless valise," shrilled Mr. Pink, hopping wildly about the fateful bag.

Dr. Nosworthy gazed at Mr. Pink for a long instant of contempt, mingled with a galling pity. Then he slowly raised a huge, hairy finger to his forehead. "Mad—mad as a mad dog," he growled. After which something gave way in the mechanism of his

throat and a series of dreadful, raucous sounds scraped out, which, in combination with the insulting leer upon his red face, were interpreted by Mr. Pink—and rightly—as derisive laughter.

What prevented our friend from incontinently falling upon Dr. Nosworthy and with no more ado slaying him in the moment of his triumph were only his many years of habitual prudent restraint and the thought of catching his train. As it was, he lifted a cursing hand and vituperated in a passionate scorn: "Sir, you are a low horse-doctor!" And with this he departed, leaving his foe still tapping insolently at his forehead.

In consequence of his unwonted exertions on the night and the morning subsequent to the death of Mrs. Pitts's Fidelio, in which period Mr. Pink was recklessly overheated and exposed to damp and chilling airs, he fell ill of a severe cold and was confined to his lodgings in the city for quite a fortnight. When he had recovered and had obtained of the taxidermist the elegantly stuffed body of the loved one—for the preparation of which he was obliged to pay what struck him as an enormous sum for a poor man to disburse even for love—James Pink set out for his native village. Though he was considerably depleted by his illness and his ruddy, round face pale and drawn, his heart, nevertheless, was lively and tinkling with amorous tunes. The entire journey he spent in fancying the delight of Mrs. Fitts over her regained pet, which—though to be sure it no longer boasted the delicious thrill of life, and Mr. Pink was prone to thank God for this—was indeed, as the interested taxidermist had remarked, "a genteel ornament for any parlor." Along with this enchanting train of thought Mr. Pink let his love-lorn imagination play among the thousand tender words fitting for the declaration of his passion which, ever since the death of Samuel Fitts, he had striven to make. Now, armed with this peculiarly acceptable sacrifice for the altar of love, it was difficult for James Pink

to conceive of any but a happy issue out of all his troubles.

So, then, the time flew swiftly and he was at home almost before he had hit upon the chastest form in which to put his declaration. It was toward six of the late May evening and the warm gold of sunset lay sweetly as a lover's kiss on the tender young green of the trees and the perfumed tide of white blossoms. Mr. Pink paused at his cottage only long enough to refresh his dress after his journey, and then made all speed to Mrs. Fitts, bearing in the mortuary valise the "offering."

As he neared the cottage a sense of ill struck in upon James Pink's hope. He assured himself that it was but the sun sinking out of sight below the horizon, but, even so, the pristine blitheness of his mood waned. As he entered the gate, an enormous dog—a larger dog than he remembered ever to have seen—galloped intimidatingly down the path full at him. With cavernous growls the beast suddenly halted his plunges and began to approach in a far more fearful fashion. He assumed an attitude as of stalking prey and crept nearer and nearer, always uttering his blood-curdling internal noises. Mr. Pink's knees became as tissue-paper, his flesh prickled, and his hat lifted uncannily from his head. Just as the creature seemed crouched for the fatal spring, Mrs. Fitts appeared on the veranda. Mr. Pink made what he intended as a loud cry for assistance. It resulted in a small squeak. But fortunately Mrs. Fitts, eying the gracious evening, saw the impending tragedy and called vigorously:

"Rover, — Rover! — *Rover!* — come right here, honey-dove, to your mama!"

Reluctantly Rover allowed himself to be dissuaded from his recreations and let Mr. Pink pass, sniffing behind him at the valise in a manner to rouse the liveliest alarm.

"Don't you be afraid, James; he's as gentle as a kitten, he is," encouraged Mrs. Fitts, "the angel pet."

Mr. Pink, reaching the veranda in comparative safety, sank exhaustedly

into a chair, dropping his bag beside him.

"Is he yours?" he asked faintly, "*yours?*"

Mrs. Fitts smiled somewhat mysteriously, but did not make direct reply.

"Where've you been?" she inquired indifferently.

"I've been ill—seriously ill," Mr. Pink answered rather importantly.

"Dear me," was the unsympathetic comment he got.

"Very ill," repeated her friend. "I may say fearfully ill."

"H'm."

It struck Mr. Pink that there was about Mrs. Fitts an absent air, as of one expecting other than that she had. Her eyes strayed off continually to the gate. Perhaps, he reasoned, it was that she thirsted for news of Fidsie and could not trust herself to inquire. With this gentle interpretation of her attitude in mind, he was about to reach for the valise, when with a furious passion the kittenish Rover attacked it, and had not Mrs. Fitts rushed upon him would have rent it in pieces before them.

"He's that playfull!" Mrs. Fitts laughed easily.

Mr. Pink shuddered at her idea of play. "I beg you to—to put him inside, Henrietta, for a moment. I—I—have a reason for asking."

Still smiling, Mrs. Fitts with endearing terms of affection lured the dog within and shut the door. Meanwhile, in her brief absence Mr. Pink had hastily taken the stuffed Fidsie from his case and, divesting him of his wrappings, set him in an extremely natural position on the edge of the porch. Then beamingly he awaited Mrs. Fitts's return.

"My Lord!" she shrieked, as her gaze fell on her former pet. "Oh, my Lord, my Lord!"

Mr. Pink laughed out in his delight. "It's our little Fidsie!" he cried happily.

Mrs. Fitts, instantly recovering, approached with curiosity the stuffed little black-and-tan, squatting alertly

on its hind-legs. She stood over it and took stock of Fidsie's appearance.

"He's quite cute, ain't he?" she remarked finally in a tone patronizing and quite devoid of feeling.

Mr. Pink stared. "*Cute?*"

"Um-hum," said Mrs. Fitts.

"*Cute?*"

"I said *cute*, James."

"But—but—Henrietta—don't you mean—don't you *like* him?" he faltered.

"He's real nice," considered Mrs. Fitts grudgingly, "but I don't like him's much as I thought I would." The captive Rover gave a long howl. "I like big dogs better, I think," she added musingly.

Mr. Pink looked at her reproachfully. "You said you would never have another dog," he returned. "Oh, Henrietta!"

Mrs. Fitts laughed. "Did I? Well, I didn't know's I ever would." She laughed again. "This dog's mine and it ain't mine. . . . 'Twas real kind of you, James, to take all that trouble, and I tell you what I'm going to do. You was always fond of poor Fidsie, wasn't you?"

"Yes, Henrietta," cheerfully lied James Pink. "He was like a—a——"

"Then I'm going to give Fidsie to you—and you'll always keep him nice and not let the moths get in him." And

with this Mrs. Fitts picked up the stuffed token and thrust it into Mr. Pink's arms.

The gate clicked and Mr. Pink, stultified by the turn of events, turned dumbly to look, the little dog absurdly in his embrace. It was Dr. Nosworthy who was coming up the walk. At sight of Pink he burst into his horrid laughter and made again his insulting sign of finger to forehead. The large dog, having escaped somehow by a rear door, tore madly about the house and, beholding his master, fell upon him with gigantic caresses. Mrs. Fitts herself stood on the top step nodding and smiling in the zenith of hospitality.

In one livid flash James Pink saw it all. And in the righteous indignation, hot and seething, of a just man who has borne too much, he flung the irresponsible Fidsie straight at the head of the approaching doctor. It did not hit him. But as it fell, Rover, the honey-dove, snatched it and in a fraction of time the lawn was strewn with Fidsie and his stuffing. Mrs. Fitts screamed. The doctor continued to laugh and gesticulate.

But Mr. Pink, in haughty dignity, made his way through the wreckage and departed—without a look, without a word—dully conscious that he was neither a dog nor a husband.



THE MYSTERY

By Clinton Scollard

A LITTLE stirring of the mold,
A little green, a little gold,
And lo! from out the umber earth,
Life's mystery of birth!

A little stirring of the mold
To cover something spent and old,
And lo! with fleeting of a breath,
Life's mystery of death!

MRS. LANGHORNE GOES HOME

By W. Carey Wonderly

“**A**ND now where?” Mrs. Langhorne had been waiting for this very question. All during the luncheon she had known that sooner or later he would put this question to her, and now that he had she met it with a well-assumed air of indifference, a tinge of uncertainty.

“Oh—a hundred places,” she replied, flicking at the great purple knot of violets at her waist. “My dressmaker—yes, again, and I want to shop a little. . . . Meredith’s. . . . And I may drop in for tea at Rosie Duval’s. Is there anything that I can do for you?”

“Thanks, nothing.”

There was a little silence. Undecided, waiting the one for the other, they stood upon the snow-covered steps of a new and very smart hotel, where they had lunched *à deux*. Of a sudden Mrs. Langhorne shivered and with a little start drew her furs more closely about her slender body. At the same moment her husband lighted a cigarette.

“May I get you a cab?” he inquired.

“Please.”

He raised his stick and a passing hansom stopped at the curb in front of the hotel.

“Come,” he said.

Still Mrs. Langhorne waited.

“And you—what will you do?” she said finally, with a ghost of a smile.

He threw away his half-smoked cigarette before he answered quietly, “Business.”

She started down the steps, lifting her gown so that the point of one tiny shoe showed below her silken skirts.

“Business!” she laughed derisively.

“Oh, can’t you men find some new excuse? Must you always lay the blame at the same poor old door and cry business!”

Langhorne touched her arm. “Do you want me to go with you, Beth?” he asked gently.

“Heavens, no!—and have business suffer thereby? My dear boy—!” She gathered up her skirts and stepped lightly into the waiting hansom. “I dare say that you men will suffer enough in Kingdom Come without your beloved business. *Au revoir*.”

“But, Beth, if you want me—” he cried.

“I do not—when I’m shopping,” she answered.

He came very near to her and spoke in a low, rapid voice. “Don’t let’s shop this afternoon, then. Come, go somewhere with me. A drive in the Park—a picture gallery—home. Let’s have tea together at home, Beth.”

His wife looked at him and laughed long and merrily. That the laughter was forced he did not notice; he only felt the mocking blue-gray eyes and saw the cruel, indifferent mouth. But despite this he rushed madly on.

“Beth! Won’t you, dear? That—business was only an excuse. Come, say the word and I’ll follow blindly—anywhere!”

“Madame Jeanneaux’s, quickly!”

There was a sharp crack of the whip, a crunching of snow, the horse’s hoofs on the asphalt and the hansom darted north on Charles street. And the woman within breathed freely.

“At last!” she sighed.

She sank back against the cushion, a charming, slender blonde, faultlessly

gowned and wearing a most wonderful set of Russian sables that somehow only served to make her appear sweeter, blonder, more girlish.

When the cabby drew rein at the modiste's Mrs. Langhorne dismissed him. Then she passed swiftly within the shop.

"I have just a second!" she cried impetuously, and madame herself hurried to her side. In a few short, broken phrases she gave an order which on the morrow she would countermand by telephone. Madame Jeanneaux, note-book and pencil in hand, listened discreetly.

"There, that will do, I think," Mrs. Langhorne said suddenly. She turned toward the door slowly as if in deep thought. "Why, my cab is gone!" she exclaimed. "Will you have them call me one, madame?"

Again she crossed the snow-covered sidewalk and stepped into a hansom. Again she spoke to the cabby and gave him an address—this time in an undertone:

"Century Theatre."

When the hansom had once more fallen into the long line of vehicles that pushed slowly north on Charles street Elizabeth Langhorne glanced at her watch. It was a quarter to four o'clock.

"Plenty of time," she murmured softly.

She leaned back and closed her eyes. She was a little tired, a little nervous. First her husband, then Jeanneaux—odious creature, her eyes saw everything. She could not have stood much more—play-acting was not her forte, and she felt this keenly. Another scene and she would be ready for bed and a dose of chloral.

Of a sudden, for she was deep in thought, the cab stopped under the porte-cochère of the Century Theatre, and a lackey in livery hurried forward. With a little nod Mrs. Langhorne dismissed the man and entered the building.

A *matinée* was in progress, and when she followed the usher to her chair well down front the curtain was raised and

the lights in the body of the house were dimmed. She slipped quietly into her place, unobserved, unobserving.

For a little she closed her eyes. She heard the players speak their lines—she had heard them so very often of late that she knew them almost as well as they did—and she knew just how far the play had progressed and who was upon the stage. Then a line was spoken, meaningless to many, but it acted upon her jaded nerves like an old rare wine. She sat up, opened her eyes, and waited—breathlessly.

Then he came upon the stage. How well she knew his handsome, debonair manner! How well she remembered his well-bred English voice, with its soft inflections, its little tricks that soothed and caressed! In an instant her entire body became alive—afire. No longer was she a pretty, blonde doll, but a breathing, living woman—a woman that lived.

Never once did her eyes leave him while he was upon the stage. She watched with abject fascination his every movement, gesture. He was as hollow, as artificial as she herself, and while in her saner moments she might have guessed this, now she gloried in his being, in the idolatry with which the great audience held him. Through the entire act—the last one it was—she sat and worshiped him with the rest of the women—down front women of fashion like herself, in the balcony silly schoolgirls, in the gallery shopgirls and ladies' maids. That all these women came there week after week to see, not the play, but to gaze open-mouthed at Eric Cecil but made him more desirable, more worthy of her worship, her sacrifice, if necessary.

When the final curtain fell and the lights were turned on in the house she sat with the rest of the women and waited. After a little two flights of stairs were let down from the stage to the two aisles in the main floor, and then the curtain ascended slowly. Upon the stage a tea-table had been placed, and while the fragrant Oolong brewed the women and men of the

company flitted about with little tea-cups on silver trays. Then the house arose as one person and filed slowly up one flight of steps to the stage.

There were those in the audience who stopped only long enough to shake Eric Cecil's hand; again many greeted Eric Cecil and the more prominent members of the company; and there were those, mostly chatting schoolgirls, who sipped the tea and gathered in little groups to discuss their idol just so long as they might remain.

Elizabeth Langhorne found herself mounting the steps with the rest. In front of her a short woman in red chewed gum and talked through her nose; following her were two shopgirls who called the star "Eric" and openly admired his nose. If she saw the woman in red, if she heard the girls behind her, Mrs. Langhorne made no answer either by look or word. She was one of them; together they had paid, as she, to gaze at him, to criticize and admire this Eric Cecil.

Mechanically she found herself shaking the hand of Irene Wyndham, the leading lady of the company, and she fancied she saw an amused gleam in her penciled eyes, a contemptuous turn at the corners of her rouged mouth. She shivered as with cold. How many times of late had she mounted the stairs to the stage and shaken the woman's hand at one of these so-called "reception matinées"!

Shame, fear, self-contempt, what you will, and it was over in another moment. Slowly Mrs. Langhorne advanced and placed her hand within Eric Cecil's grasp.

"So glad," he said, without meeting her glance.

She murmured a few meaningless phrases and passed on. In a moment she was coming down the other flight of stairs; in five minutes she was outside the theatre, the cold air biting her cheeks. How good it felt out in the open, away from the lights and the music and the women! She breathed hungrily the fresh, wintry air and directly the cloud lifted, she was better.

She crossed the street, and walked

as far as the corner where the lights gleamed gaily from the window of an apothecary shop. She entered timidly and drank a glass of mineral water at the soda-fountain. Then she retreated to the other side of the shop and, diving down in her muff, drew forth a tiny, twisted bit of notepaper:

"Come to my apartment at six. I must see you."

She read it twice, rapidly, again slowly, spelling out each little word. There was no address, no signature, but she knew—she knew. As she had shaken his hand, then—! When she had withdrawn her hand it was there, pressed flat in her palm. And she knew.

From her position in the shop window she could look out into the street, and before her stretched a great snow-covered avenue, lighted by a double row of gas lamps and crowned at the top by a clock tower ablaze with electric light. The clock in the tower brought her sharply back to earth. She glanced at her watch. It was a quarter-past five.

Mechanically she gathered her furs about her and trailed slowly across the shop to the door. A man, about to enter, threw it wide and waited for her to pass out. She did so, and stopped on the snow-covered pavement to think, to gain time, to go—where? The clock tower with its electric lights gaily beckoned her westward, and she gazed half stupidly, half fascinated at the wide, double gas-lamped avenue. Then her gaze wandered, and away to the south, softened and beautified in the dusk of a Winter afternoon, she saw the tall marble shaft that arose at the intersection of two great squares. She was at the crossway—before her stretched the avenue with the frivolous electric-lighted tower and again the narrower, quieter street with the wonderful marble shaft at its end.

". . . my apartment at six—" Her lips formed rather than spoke the words.

A mail-cart rolled down the street; a clock in a near-by church chimed the half-hour. Quietly she gathered her

skirts from contact with the street and started up the avenue toward the clock tower.

She well knew Eric Cecil's address. Time and again she had passed the ugly yellow apartment-house where he lived during his stay in town. It was quiet—and for that reason Cecil had preferred it to more fashionable apartments, said the knowing world—and no person within its walls was upon Mrs. Langhorne's visiting-list. She was glad of this—glad as she remembered that she would meet no one in the corridor who knew her, for first and foremost she was a woman, and despite her indiscretion still possessed her little vanities.

When the elevator had stopped at the fourth floor and let her out she hesitated a second before following the man's directions and turning down the side corridor to the last suite on that floor. That, the Buttons had informed her, was the way to Cecil's apartment. Mrs. Langhorne had flushed scarlet as she stopped in the lobby to question the boy, but his answer had been so easily given, so quietly and withal so respectfully, that her fears had melted and she had fed him generously.

Now, outside his apartment, her hand about to press the electric button, she again hesitated. But only for a moment. The next and the door was opened by a short, expressionless little Englishman and she was ushered into Eric Cecil's sitting-room.

"Mr. Cecil his not hin, ma'am. I'm hexpecting 'im hevery minute," the man explained, as he drew the curtains and lighted the lamp.

Mrs. Langhorne bowed her head and the man silently withdrew.

For a second, an eternity, when she found she was alone in his rooms, Elizabeth Langhorne closed her eyes and grasped tightly the arms of her chair. Then, slowly, she found her senses returning. She sat up and threw off her heavy furs, loosening the laces at her throat—she was suffocating. She glanced about the room. It was a pretty room. She stood up. The walls were dark, a deep red, and

the furniture was dark, with crimson cushions; the curtains and draperies were of the same shade. The rugs were deep and soft and wonderful and even the open grate-fire burned ruddily. In this crimson, beautiful room Elizabeth Langhorne, with her blonde loveliness, seemed like some angel of light. She herself was conscious of this, and throwing herself into a great be-cushioned chair which she had dragged before the fire, she posed and admired her own beauty.

She was sitting thus when the curtains at the far end of the room were pushed unceremoniously aside, and a woman entered the apartment from the room beyond. Her face wore a pleased, self-satisfied smile, and she crossed to Mrs. Langhorne with a directness that showed that she was aware of her presence even before she had stepped through the curtains.

"You are Mrs. Langhorne," she said, as if stating a fact, "Mrs. Tom Langhorne, wife of Tom Langhorne, clubman and broker?"

At first Elizabeth was frightened, but the mention of her husband's occupation brought a steely glitter into her placid blue eyes and she met the woman's glance without a tremor.

"My husband is Mr. Langhorne, broker," she replied coldly. "We will dispense with the clubman, if you please. . . . May I ask who you are?"

The woman nodded her head. "Jealous, eh?" she said, "and of his business, too."

Elizabeth Langhorne flushed angrily. "Will you tell me your position in this house?" she queried. "Why you are here?"

"Possibly for the same reason as yourself, Mrs. Langhorne," the woman returned. Then she came over and leaned masculinely against the chimney-piece. "But I'm not. I'm Irene Wolfe, of the *Morning Planet*, and I'm here for news."

A reporter; Elizabeth studied her with contemptuous eyes. She was a tall woman, but rather thin and with sharp features which were unduly ac-

cented because of her style of dress—she wore a tailored suit of green, severe and unlovely. Her face had a hungry look, and her eyes were never still an instant, flitting from Elizabeth's hair to her gown, from the violets at her waist to the rings on her fingers. They were eyes that saw everything; saw and understood.

"Poor little moth," she said at last. Her eyes rested with wonder and pity on Mrs. Langhorne's pretty face. "Poor, silly moth!" she repeated slowly.

Elizabeth made a gesture of dissent. The woman got upon her nerves with her searching eyes and hungry mouth. "I wish you would go back from where you came a moment ago," she said a trifle shrilly. "You—you are unpardonable. If you are waiting to see Mr. Cecil, kindly step into the next room. He will be ready for an interview shortly."

The woman's lips smiled. "No, never mind Eric Cecil," she said. "I did want to see him, but you'll do just as well—better, in fact. . . . So you're in the habit of meeting that actor fellow in his rooms—good Lord! How can some women have so little sense, I wonder? You come here to see him—you, who are married to another man!"

Mrs. Langhorne moved uncomfortably in her chair. "Spare me, do!" she cried, with a little shrug.

"Spare you! Never! This will look uncommonly great on the front page of the *Planet*. 'Society woman caught at actor's apartment.'"

"No!" Like a tigress Elizabeth Langhorne had sprung from the chair and caught at the woman's arms. Her usually expressionless eyes glowed like live coals. Gently she swung Miss Wolfe back and forth in her grasp. "It's a lie, a lie!" she cried. "You have no right—no right to say those things to me."

Miss Wolfe released herself, a little shaken, but with the smile still mocking at the other woman. "I have every right," she said. "I find you here in his rooms—your hat and coat thrown aside, warming your feet on his fender.

Oh, yes, I have a right to say and think—anything."

"I tell you you are wrong." Elizabeth sank back against the chair for support and fixed her eyes appealingly upon Miss Wolfe. "I came here to-night—because—I was lonely. Yes, I was lonely. Eric Cecil wanted me—he didn't—I was so lonely. I was reckless, maddened, and I came when he asked me to come."

Miss Wolfe leaned eagerly forward. "And do you know why I am here?" she said.

Elizabeth shook her head.

"Because an hour ago the office received a 'phone message asking that somebody be sent to Eric Cecil's apartments at once. It said that news was to be found there. Of course, we knew what to expect."

"My God!" the wife cried.

"And do you know who telephoned us?" Miss Wolfe continued.

"No."

"Mr. Eric Cecil himself."

Mrs. Langhorne shivered and held out one hand to the blaze. "You mean that he—'phoned you to come here when he knew—? He had asked me to come to him here! Oh, you are mistaken—indeed, indeed you are!"

"Mistaken? Not a bit of it! Why, do you think this is the first time he has played this little trick? Well, it isn't! Nor the second, nor the third! Eric Cecil—that man is—damnable! How you women—! Why, you are his stock in trade—you!"

"Don't, please!" Mrs. Langhorne held up her hand appealingly. "There is no need for you to go on with your story. I am not interested, and—"

"But you are, Mrs. Langhorne," the woman interrupted. "Listen! I am going to tell you a bit of common truth. Women—women such as you are Eric Cecil's stock in trade. You adore his profile, you love his voice, you worship his shoulders. His hair is golden, his eyes are azure, his mouth is too sweet for words. Why, without you women where would he be? Selling muslins in a department-store or peddling religious pictures for an in-

stallment house. You women have made Eric Cecil what he is. He is despicable—a coward, a cad, a man without honor, but you have no one but yourselves to thank—you have made him what he is by your hero-worship."

Mrs. Langhorne laughed, but her voice was none too sure when she spoke. "You talk as if I were responsible for everything—Cecil's many sins and shortcomings. May not I as a woman admire his art—~~his~~?"

"Rubbish! There's no art about that man—nor heart either, for that matter. See here, he deliberately made this appointment with you and then 'phoned the office, asking us to send a reporter to these apartments, giving us to understand that we'd find a news story worth while for our trouble. The chief hustled me right off, and I find you. I was in the other room when Cecil's man showed you in here. At first I only saw a woman, but when you moved into the circle of the lamp I saw Mrs. Tom Langhorne—and I wondered. Don't you know I could ruin you socially?"

Elizabeth had found her way to a chair and sat, her chin in her hand, gazing silently into the fire. She moved a little uneasily as the woman broke off abruptly with the last pertinent question.

"Don't you know that I can publish your name all over the country as a woman without honor?" Miss Wolfe insisted cruelly.

"You are wrong—indeed, indeed you are!" Mrs. Langhorne cried earnestly. "I have been foolish—yes, that's the word—foolish—but anything else—! Oh, you have no right to say such things to me!"

"But I have," smiled Miss Wolfe.

Elizabeth turned upon her almost savagely. "You have no right, no right to say such things to me. I am Mrs. Langhorne."

"I have every right, Mrs. Langhorne, and you yourself gave me that right when you came to Eric Cecil's apartments. A woman who deliberately places herself in such a position must take the consequences of her

folly. I rather think this little story will create a sensation when it appears in the *Planet* tomorrow morning."

"It mustn't!" She arose and came quickly over to the woman's side. "Don't! Don't! I will give you—anything. Here, here is my purse—not much, but tomorrow I will send you—whatever you may ask. Or my rings—here, take them all—every one—only don't let this get into the papers. It—would kill him."

"Him?"

"Yes, my husband!"

"But you didn't think of him a moment ago when you came here. Why now? And what difference should it make to me? Why, this is my business! If you women were not so foolish——"

Mrs. Langhorne caught her arm cruelly. "For Tom's sake!" she pleaded. "Not mine, not for myself do I ask, but for his sake. It—it would kill him!"

Miss Wolfe slowly released the clinging fingers. Then she went over to the wide crimson settle and returned with Elizabeth Langhorne's hat and furs.

"You are going home now," she said briskly, "and tomorrow we will have forgotten all this ugly hour. Come!"

"You mean——?"

"I do!"

She gave Elizabeth her hat and watched her half enviously place it on her wonderful head of hair. How little some people appreciated—things, many things, she thought, with a little sigh. Mrs. Langhorne, catching a glimpse of herself in the mirror, saw the woman's look and understood at least a part of the hungry expression in her face.

"Jeanneaux made it. I have an account with her. Go and get one like it," she said.

Miss Wolfe gave her the priceless sable neck-piece. "Thanks, I will," she returned quietly.

Elizabeth, resplendent and matchless, stood waiting, a little nervous, not quite sure how to say it. To this woman, this plain little woman standing quietly beside her, she owed a debt

—that it almost frightened her to remember.

Suddenly she held out her hand. She could say nothing because she was afraid that she might say too much.

At the same instant the telephone-bell in the room beyond rang out sharply. Both women listened intently. Then came the sound of a closing door, footsteps soft and padded, and then Cecil's man's voice, low and apologetic.

Miss Wolfe laughed. "It's Cecil asking if the coast is clear. Oh, why do they call him a man—a man!"

Elizabeth shook her head gently. Eric Cecil had gone out of her life forever; she cared little what they said of him.

"Come," said Miss Wolfe suddenly. "If you have ever doubted me—doubted what I have said to you about that little cad, go to that door and listen to what his man is telling him."

"I have never doubted you," Elizabeth answered quickly. "I feel here that it is the truth."

There was an awkward little pause. Both women seemed waiting, the one for the other. At last Miss Wolfe pulled herself together and opened the door leading out into the hall.

"Good night," she said briskly.

Elizabeth Langhorne caught at her hand. There was a momentary pause, a breathless moment, and then she passed out of the room.

"Good night," she echoed softly.



BELOVED, IF TONIGHT—

By Gertrude M. Cawein

BELOVED, if tonight by moonlit walls
 Our spirits glided, meeting face to face,
 And in our hearts, long dead, should thrill the grace
 Of old, sweet fires that lit our youth's fair halls,
 Would it be dear, this memory as it falls
 So late in life's spent pageant, limning space
 With shadowy joys of a forgotten race
 And all the potent memories it recalls?

Would it not rather seem to thee and me
 Reopening of old wounds and bitter wrongs?—
 As when some ancient, outcast melody,
 Found in old books of long-forgotten songs,
 Awakens in the soul of memory
 Pale ghosts of pain and sorrowing phantom throngs.



APPARENTLY

POLICE JUSTICE—What is your occupation?
PRISONER—I am a gentleman.
 "Off duty at present?"

February, 1908—7

BY THE BELT LINE

By D. E. Dermody

A SMOOTH-FACED poet, with close-cropped red hair, lay on his back on the greensward and rolled his blue eyes in melting frenzy at a brown-eyed, brown-haired nymph seated near him, holding in her lap a wide-brimmed hat wreathed with natural wild-blossoms, the petals of which she was methodically perforating with a hatpin.

They were in one of the secluded sylvan nooks that made the Summer resort popular among poets and nymphs.

The poet had been pleading his cause unsuccessfully for the last hour, every word that he employed to endear being countered with a nymphaean jeer. In desperation he appealed to his muse and began reading scribbled verses from the back of a torn envelope.

"A bevy of fairies flew over the lawn
In the shining Summer morning;
I looked again and they were gone,
And it was no longer morning."

"Fair-airies!" mused the nymph, as if unfamiliar with the little flower-people of whom one might, not unjustifiably, have assumed her to be a larger and proportionately lovelier species. "Whatever do your silly verses mean, Fred?"

"Why, Philippa" (he was irrevocably forbidden ever to diminutize her name), "it is a nice thought, nicely expressed. It means youth and the beauty of the world as youth sees it, a fairy lawn. But when the morning of life is gone the beauty goes with it—there are no more fairies, nothing but the dank garden of life's Autumn."

"How sad! You are so old, Fred—so very, very old!"

"No, Philippa dear——"

"Fred Kingsley!"

"Philippa Arcott! I was saying, this is our fairy time, our morning of life, and youth is poetry."

"Boo-boo!" Philippa commented intelligently. "Who cares for old poetry? I want a rattlesnake."

"A what?" yelled the poet, his eyes rolling in a frenzy that was genuine.

"A rattlesnake skin *belt*," amended Philippa. "All the girls are getting them. Amy Reese has one three inches wide—such a love of a grand one—and Minnie Hawkins and Elsa Compton."

"I wouldn't be downcast, if I were you; there may be a few left in the shops," comforted the practical poet. "If your finances are low I might—er—lend you a tenner. Or do they come in merger-trust prices only?"

"And you call yourself a poet!" mourned the disillusioned nymph. "Who wants to *buy* a rattlesnake belt? Anybody could get one that way. Amy Reese's papa killed a rattlesnake in the lake and had it—the skin, I mean—made into a belt; and when Elsa Compton saw it she just raved, and wanted one like it; and, do you know, that boy from Wilmington, the one who has such ugly red hair" (the poet was too inured to this sort of fling to mind it), "went straight out to the lake and killed a rattlesnake for her, and had its skin mounted for her in the loveliest style, with Amy's initials on the buckle, and afterward she found *his* initials hidden in the floral design. But she pretends to him that she has never discovered it, because she doesn't want to have to give the belt back."

"How do they catch them in the

lake?—swim after them?” asked Fred excitedly, the glamour of knight-errantry misting the blue of his eyes.

“You foolish boy!” chided Philippa, luring him on with a siren smile. “They’d bite you, or—or hit you with their rattles, whichever it is they do. You see, the lake’s dry; there’s nothing in it but mud. It’s only a cat-o’-nine-tail pond, you know, and it always goes dry in the boating season. The rattle-snakes are thirsty and go down there all the time looking for water—such great, glossy dears—and it’s easy to kill them.”

Philippa was certainly an artist in her imitation of a foolish child, but young Kingsley knew her for something better than that. Their make-believe wooing and scorning was not merely a Midsummer pastime; it had been their favorite recreation since high-school days. The jest was becoming ashes in Kingsley’s mouth, but he had never been able, so far as their relations were concerned, to surprise her into an earnest look or word, though he would have given much to know the true state of her mind. The very nearness of their lives seemed to have set them apart from each other, although, as for him, he paled at the bare thought of a future in which Philippa was not all in all, and he felt that it was time to bestir himself in safeguarding her for that future with him.

He scrambled to his feet and made a low obeisance.

“A favor, fair lady—I enter the lists for you. Wait here until I bring the runabout. You’ll want to witness the tournament, of course?”

She gave him her hand to help her rise, and pinned a mutilated wild-rose on his coat-lapel.

“My knight and champion, how splendid of you! If you win me the trophy I’ll—”

“You’ll what, Philippa?” he eagerly queried, as she hesitated.

“Oh, I’ll do anything, Fred! I’ll—I’ll not tease you for a whole day.”

Fred looked blank, and strode off with unknightly brusqueness.

He returned a few minutes later, in

a baby auto, into which he assisted Philippa, and they chugged away toward the lake, he gazing gloomily ahead, she chattering in girlish anticipation, affecting not to be aware that he was cross.

Beyond the woodland, in the uncultivated meadows, they discovered the little jungle of cat-o’-nine-tails, rushes, water-lilies and other plants indigenous to slime, that marked the location of the “lake.” Half-a-dozen Gibson girls in Summer colors, posing in the slender shade of the only near-by tree, greeted them like a flock of magpies, while through interstices of the lake greenery there might now and then be caught glimpses of flanneled youths, presumably pursuing rattle-snakes to adorn the corsages of their lady-loves. Amid greetings and laughter, Kingsley joined these adventurers.

He had been twice up to his ankle in ooze, had gathered a goodly harvest of dead, feathery filaments of leafage in the fuzz of his flannels, and was bending over a curious little blue floweret, which seemed to peer appealingly up at him, from its bed of mud, through the wiry grass that caged it. Reaching down to pluck the pathetic trifle, he was conscious of a sharp sting on his left wrist, and, hastily withdrawing his hand, marked the humming flight of a sinister something through the foliated mesh before him.

He coolly inspected the red spot on his wrist, noting that it was almost visibly swelling. Suddenly his jaws closed with a snap, his brow wrinkled in a puzzled expression, and, gripping the hurt wrist above the red warning, he turned and hurried out of the accursed greenery.

“Got a rattlesnake already, Kingsley?” asked his friend Ralstone, who had emerged almost simultaneously from another part of the pond.

“No, it got me,” Kingsley blurted in no gentle tone, as he hastened to the runabout, still clutching and inspecting his wrist.

The girls under the shade tree heard and fluttered toward him, Philippa in the lead.

"What is it, Mr. Kingsley?" cried one, but received no reply. Philippa, at his side, had asked the same question in so low a voice that none of the others had heard it.

For answer he held up his wrist, exhibiting the fiery lump that had rapidly developed there.

"I must get back to town at once," he said tersely, and stepped into the machine.

Philippa, her face whiter than any water-lily that ever shadowed a snake, stepped in on the other side and took hold of the steering wheel.

She twirled it recklessly, and the toy motor, gathering instant momentum, wrought a sun-glinted dust-cloud for itself, in which it sailed throbbingly away.

Kingsley, staring down the road, turned his head in response to a telepathic appeal, such as wakes the sleeper who is being gazed at, to meet the eyes of Philippa, and the joy-blood surged wildly to his face as he beheld in them the look that, for these many days, he had yearned, as pure men do, to see. Their lips met, wordless; and the girl's tear-dimmed, anguished eyes turned again to the ominous red blot on his wrist.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, "why had I forgotten?" And, before he could fathom her purpose, she had caught up his wrist and pressed the wound to her lips, sucking the virus.

His free hand sought the steering wheel to avert a possible disaster, while he remonstrated; but she twined her arm tensely about his, that she might consummate her act of service.

If it occurred to her lover that, owing to the location of the sting, there was nothing to prevent him from performing the service for himself, he said nothing.

Philippa, with a handkerchief dipped in alcohol at her mouth, remained in the auto in front of the doctor's office in the village while Kingsley leaped across the red-brick sidewalk and up the wooden stairway.

At the end of ten minutes he came down again, smiling. It had seemed to Philippa as that many hours.

"Here is an antidote for you, though the doctor says there is no possible danger," he assured her, as he stepped into the runabout. "Oh, it's all right about me!" he replied to her questioning look. "Dr. Wheatland says the poison was drawn out cleanly. There will be nothing to it but a little swelling and irritation, which will soon disappear."

Philippa breathed heavily, as one waking from an awful nightmare, and, as they rolled slowly homeward, the color gradually stole back to her cheeks and the sauciness into her eyes, softened now by a tenderness she could no longer conceal.

They were married six months later.

Three months after that, in their cozy apartments in town, Philippa, dressed for the theatre, trampled on an immemorial tradition by waiting while her husband put the finishing touches to his toilet. Peering in impatiently at him, she chanced to observe him hesitate as he was about to slip on his left cuff, gazing abstractedly at his wrist and presently lifting that supple member caressingly to his lips.

"Silly! What are you doing that for?" she asked, thinking she knew.

"Should not the spot be sacred to me, dearest?" he replied. "I kiss it every day, and bless my stars for that day of happy omen when—forgive me, love—when I was stung by a bumble-bee."

"You—you wretch!" gasped Philippa, her amazed eyes blinking wide and then growing stony, while a dull red succeeded the delicate pink of her cheeks.

But, possessing her, he was brazenly impenitent.

"You were so gullible, Phil darling!" he said, forcibly tilting up her sweet, swollen face, the better to wine himself with its roses. "Nobody ever believes snake stories."

THE LOW WHITE HOUSE

By Mildred McNeal-Sweeney

IT is upon a gentle hill—
This little, solitary house.
Green of the south runs to the sill—
The poinciana's delicate frond,
The pale sword-grass; and just beyond
The wall a tall old cedar wood
Bends down his darkling brows.

The silence of the place at times
Divides, and in a pleasant key
That half is silence, the soft rhymes
Of wind in the wood take up their song
Whereunto, musing, I listen long
Remembering how, by any path,
It is not far to reach the sea.

A little fairy country without,
Lying secure from time's rough news!
The serene distance all about!—
Within a woman, and gentle rule
Whereto I put my heart to school
In memory, to find the way
Of that bright patience women use.

There was a low seat at the door;
And thither, in secret, many a day
I make return and sit an hour.
The quiet hill, the white, low roof
They tenderly offer me reproof
For my poor haste, saying, "*Life is fair.*
The wise men linger by the way."



THE CRUSH

NODD—Are you going to your wife's reception today?

TODD—I should say not. Why, I would just as soon think of passing the afternoon in a Fifth avenue stage.

THE LOUIS QUINZE SALON

OR, A FRIEND OF MRS. ROBINSON

By Richard Butler Glaenzer

PERSONS

MRS. DUDLEY BENNETT VAN WART (*née Apollonia Green, a lady of Utica and unexpected millions*).

CYRIL VARNEY (*a decorator of high repute*).

PLUMMER (*a mere salesman*).

PLACE: *The galleries of Messrs. Varney, Michel & Stein, Decorators de Luxe, Fifth avenue, Manhattan.*

TIME: 11 A.M.

IMAGINE a room not more than twenty-five feet wide by forty long, with walls almost entirely concealed by Gobelin tapestries, on the proceeds of which His Grace the Duke of Cresset is now carrying a stable and Miss Folly de Vaude. Here and there stand Vernis Martin cabinets containing bits of Limoges, Saxe and Dresden. Scattered about are large arm-chairs of the Spanish Renaissance covered with jardinière velvets, while occasional stretchers support copes and chasubles of gold or silver filched from the churches of Italy. A sixteenth-century Persian rug hides the parquet and forms an agreeable foothold for PLUMMER, who is languidly gazing out of the window at the horses, which are slipping about the asphalt, as they attempt to draw their smart turnouts through the crush. Altogether the scene is one of refinement and comfort and the furnishings not unlike those seen in any one of the houses of upper Fifth avenue. Enter MRS. DUDLEY BENNETT VAN WART, very stout and impressive, with magnificent rustling of skirts, etc.

PLUMMER (*swinging about and bowing with the perfection of long practice*)

Is there any way in which I can serve you, madam?

MRS. VAN WART (*bobbing her pompadour and her pheasant plumes*)

I wish to see Mr. Varney or Monsieur Michel—yes, or even Mr. Stein, if—

PLUMMER (*tremendously impressed*)

Mr. Varney should be in his office—unless I am mistaken, madam. Will you not take a chair, madam? Just one moment, madam. (*Exit PLUMMER precipitously, his face illuminated by the expectation of a raise.* MRS. VAN WART seems to find it easier to stand. She floats about majestically, gazing upon the Jeffersonian simplicity which surrounds her, and trying to believe that it reminds her of her grandfather's parlor at Tonawanda. Reenter PLUMMER, smiling, followed by Mr. CYRIL VARNEY, whose blond mustache harmonizes delightfully with a rich brown sack suit, sage-green scarf, moonstone stick-pin and oh, such charm of manner, which now takes the form of a slight inclination that might easily develop into a bow.)

PLUMMER

Here is Mr. Varney, madam.

MRS. VAN WART

Why, of course—Mr. Cyril Varney! I am so pleased to have found you in, Mr. Varney. Mrs. Phelps-Thorp, you know—

VARNEY (*hopefully*)

Mrs. Thorp, whose drawing-room—?

MRS. VAN WART (*ignoring the interruption*)

—showed me the salon, which you designed for her—so exquisite—so dainty! You have such delicious taste, Mr. Varney.

VARNEY (*with deprecating smile*)

Oh, that is a matter of—

MRS. VAN WART

Oh, yes, you have, Mr. Varney. Everybody says so, and the last time I was here with my friend, Mrs. Robinson—you remember that day, Mr. Varney?

VARNEY (*with the utmost cordiality*)

I most certainly do, madam.

MRS. VAN WART

Well, on that day I made up my mind that sometime you should decorate *my* parlor—a salon for *me*—and—

VARNEY

Indeed, nothing would give—

MRS. VAN WART

—so I thought I would drop in, Mr. Varney, and ask you to tell me what you would suggest for the salon in our new house; whether it would be nice to have it Louis Seize—Louis Seize is all the rage this year—but then—

VARNEY

It depends, of course, on what—

MRS. VAN WART

—Mrs. Jack Graystone has a Louis Seize salon, and so perhaps the Louis Quinze style would be nicer—Louis Quinze is so stylish, don't you think so, Mr. Varney?—and—

VARNEY (*in the breach*)

Decidedly—decidedly, if—

MRS. VAN WART

—besides, we want so much to avoid anything too ornate, *too* like all those awful houses of the nouveaux riches. No, something quiet like Louis Quinze would be lovely, don't you think so, Mr. Varney? and—

VARNEY

But, Mrs.—

MRS. VAN WART (*inexorably launched*)

—of course, it wouldn't be necessary to be *too* correct—oh, I hope not, Mr. Varney; for, you know, I have set my heart on using the mantel I purchased

in Munich; a big, beautiful carved one in oak, with a top like the one in Nuremberg with queer little soldiers on it. The man said it was an antique, but I loved it so that he let us have it at a ridiculously low price just to be obliging; so you see, we must use it somewhere, and anyway, such a beautiful mantel would go well in any room, now, wouldn't it, Mr. Varney? and—

VARNEY

I hardly—

MRS. VAN WART

—then I am forgetting the furniture. You should see the wonderful set of chairs we bought in Firenze! There are just the sweetest cupids on the backs, and all over carving out of walnut—*solid* walnut, the dealer said, and he offered a guarantee that they came from the Palazzo of the Prince of Guidomorni, but anyone can see that without a guarantee. And then there's a table that goes with them! It's even lovelier than the chairs. Naturally, we will just have to use that, too, in the salon. Mrs. Phelps-Thorp has an Italian table that simply can't compare with ours, and you made her put it in *her* parlor, didn't you, Mr. Varney? and—

VARNEY (*bravely*)

Yes, madam, but in that c—

MRS. VAN WART (*undaunted*)

—oh, yes, there's that old damask of the Renaissance, which I found in Spain—in Seville—the richest yellow and red! I just had to buy it for the walls. Now, don't tell me it's not Louis Quinze! I know it, but I am sure Louis Quinze would have used it if he'd had it. Don't you really believe so, Mr. Varney?

VARNEY (*tactfully*)

It is possible that—

MRS. VAN WART

There! I knew you would agree with me. It is probable that he would have used it—such a gorgeous pattern! But you should look at the thing we picked up in Zurich to make into a chandelier—oh, you will love it, I know, Mr. Varney—such a pretty thing made out of stags' antlers and a quaint sort of a mermaid lady. It will be easy

enough to turn it all into an electric fixture and will prevent the room from being too stiff, don't you think so, Mr. Varney?

VARNEY (*with resignation*)

Why, if you say so, madam—

MRS. VAN WART (*discovering the time through an accidental encounter with the face of a gigantic Dutch clock*)

Heavens, Mr. Varney! You don't mean to say it is as late as that? I simply must be going. I'm so sorry, because—but then, after all—as soon as one of your young men has taken the measurements of the room and you have made one of those pretty drawings in color, perhaps we can decide on some of the things and then if it doesn't cost *too* much—but it *won't*, now will it, Mr. Varney? (*Making ready for departure.*) You'll let me know when the drawings are ready—soon? please! (*Starting for the door.*) On Friday? Friday, *please*, Mr. Varney! There! I really'll have to leave. Good day, Mr. Varney. You have such exquisite taste! Oh, I know the salon

will be perfect. (*Looking back.*) But not *too* expensive, Mr. Varney. (*From the vestibule.*) Remember, simple and dignified. Good day, Mr. Varney. (*Hesitating on the top step.*) And don't forget, Louis Quinze—not Louis Seize. Umh, I think that's all. Good day, Mr. Varney!

(*Exit with same impressiveness and rustling of silk and satin.*)

VARNEY (*slightly ruffled, but striving to maintain a proper composure before his hureling*)

Plummer, I wish you to see to it that those measurements are taken sometime tomorrow—then get Dubois—no! Kressler will do—to hurry out a sketch for Mrs.—eh—Plummer, what was it you said was the lady's name?

PLUMMER (*fairly gasping*)

Name! Why, I couldn't have told you, sir! She didn't mention it to *me*. I rather fancied you knew, sir, and, eh—I was quite *sure* you did when she said she was a friend of Mrs. Robinson.

CURTAIN.



SONG

By William H. Hayne

O SWEETER far than Spring-born flowers,
Whose petals breathe the dew,
My thoughts unfold, in morning hours,
And bloom, my love, for you!

O braver than a bird who sings
Beneath the cloudless blue,
My hopes ascend, on buoyant wings,
And fly, sweetheart, to you!

O stronger than the tides that sweep
In music grand and true,
My spirit, from its inmost deep,
Flows out, dear heart, to you!

THE PRODIGAL PARENT

By Guy Bolton

GERRY CLAYBORO could never remember who introduced him to his daughter. That it was not a uniformed nurse in a dimly-lighted bedroom argued nothing, perhaps, save some lack of proper parental anxiety, but that the first meeting between father and child should take place in a crowded ball-room eighteen years after he had heard of her existence, and six since she had known of his, bespoke the unusual.

This was in itself rather gratifying to Mr. Clayboro. His one employment was a pursuit of the unusual, or perhaps it might more fairly be said, a flight from the commonplace, and while the long chase had taken him through well-trodden paths as often as very wild ones, he had never paused long enough in any to be overtaken by the much dreaded ennui.

His marriage, which he always referred to as the most foolhardy escapade of his career, had been as short-lived as a wise world had foretold. The wise world did not, however, detract from its triumphant "I told you so!" by adding that the reasoning on which its prophecy had been based was proved entirely at fault. Gerry Clayboro had not slammed the door behind him with a Nora-like rejoicing in his freedom. Instead, he had been pushed forth and had hammered long on the relentless panels, exhausting every effort of entreaty and cajolement to regain admittance. He did, to be sure, upon bowing to the adamant will of his New England wife, turn back with every appearance of joyous relief to the familiar haunts and easy pleasures of his bachelorhood. He seemed to be

recovering from a strange obsession—a fact which he recognized in terming himself a spiritual convalescent; and for eighteen years natural curiosity concerning the posthumous token of his ill-starred nuptial experiment had never prompted him to demand the "access" he had been granted by the courts.

The meeting, even when it did occur, was in a measure accidental. If Mrs. Courtney Marsh hadn't been so fond of making grotesque human compounds much after the manner and with about the same effect that a chemist makes fireworks, the audacious experiment of throwing father and daughter together—just to see what would happen—might in all probability never have been tried.

"Nonsense!" Gerry Clayboro remembered he had exclaimed. "My daughter? That wide-browed, serious female person in the corner? As though it were not sufficiently incredible that one of my tender years should acknowledge to a family at all! No, no, it is her undeniable—though I must add, uncultivated—grace and beauty that have made you jump to this preposterous conclusion. Why, she has wisdom enough to be my grandmother, and certainly enough to be a wise child, so I shall go over and request her to clear my character."

What he did say, as she met his pleasant "Good evening" with a bewildered glance, was: "I'm afraid I'm rather late."

The tone was anxiously apologetic, and Viola scanned her dance order perplexedly.

"Very, very late—in fact, eighteen.

years late," he went on, smiling blandly as he drew up a chair.

It bore witness to her profound common sense that she did not immediately decide this tall, gray-haired man with the monocle and waxed mustache to be a lunatic. Instead, she concluded that he was one of the modern social humorists which, it must be allowed, meant to her very much the same thing.

"I am afraid that you have the advantage of me," she said coldly.

Gerry Clayboro chuckled; he was enjoying himself hugely.

"Impossible, my dear, if you're like your mother—which you surely are."

He leaned forward and his tone changed. "Look in my face—doesn't something tell you who I am? My dear, dear child, I am your father."

She obeyed him with but a momentary doubt of the quaver in his voice. A portrait that had appeared recently in one of the papers, befogged and ill-printed as it had been, completed her assurance.

"Father!" she cried, and put out her hands timidly. He took them, and bending down kissed her on that same broad brow which had drawn his comment a few moments before.

Gerry Clayboro saw his daughter on the day following—called for her, in fact, at the familiar Madison avenue house; but he did not alight from the carriage. He sent up the footman with a note instead, and waited until Viola appeared smilingly, arrayed for the drive.

She answered his perfunctory inquiry as to her mother's health, informing him that she was far from well. His wife had always been, he reflected, one of those brittle people aggressively robust; but with none of the elasticity that will enable them to sustain health at a lower level than that of tireless activity. When someone once remarked that she had no repose Gerry Clayboro acquiesced, adding ruefully, "But I shouldn't talk; in those days no more did I."

He may have had this in mind rather more vividly than usual when Viola

begged him upon their return to come in and see her mother.

He shook his head. "She is very kind to want to see me, but I am afraid of upsetting her just now. I will call when she is feeling stronger."

Two days later he started on his return to Paris, longing with a homesickness that had oppressed him during his absences in these recent years for the boulevards and cafés, the gaily-dressed crowds at Chantilly, for his friends of both the colony and the quarter, and most of all for Mrs. Whittemore's genial companionship.

Caught again in the stream of the bright, sparkling life he loved, he almost forgot his daughter, but a letter soon came to remind him of her. This he promptly answered, and in response to his request received a photograph that he exhibited to Mrs. Whittemore—concealing his pride—with little success, perhaps, since he was dealing with a clever woman who understood him marvelously well under a veil of critical persiflage.

Jane Whittemore admired the portrait with a gentle genuineness that so charmingly tempered her usual delicately ironical wit. Jane Austen, Gerry sometimes called her, and no description could have been more apt. Excessive indolence and love of mere living combined to limit the enjoyment of her gifts to her circle of friends—without a larger audience than most artists command.

Mrs. Whittemore now gazed from the picture to Gerry Clayboro's face, and back again.

"She has an abridged edition of your mouth and chin—save that I can't flatter you by finding any likeness between you and this pretty girl. She may have mental qualities that resemble her father's, but earnestness is written on every feature—so morally she's your very antithesis. She's the image of her mother, I should say."

Gerry, lounging back among a heap of cushions on the low divan, nodded. He blew a ring of cigarette smoke and watched its slow attenuation.

"Earnestness — that means her

mother. Blood of her Puritan ancestors, how earnest she was! No rest, not a moment's pause in some shady by-way. 'Purposeful striving,' that was her watchword, and I ask you, could the perverted ingenuity of the Inquisition itself produce a more blood-chilling phrase?"

"You poor boy! But then if that adventure did cost you half your income and considerable inconvenience, it gave you a new view of life and a very pretty daughter—what does she say in the letter?"

"Oh, you must hear it—*that's* the fun."

They read it over together. Viola seemed filled with a new enthusiasm. She was going in for Settlement work, and though she had so recently come out, intended to eschew henceforth balls, parties and all the other pomps and vanities of a frivolous community.

The two middle-aged hedonists laughed—albeit a little sorrowfully. Mrs. Whittemore ended in a sigh: "O youth, idealizing, rhapsodizing youth!"

The cream of the feast came, however, at the end.

And now, dear father [she wrote], I must tell you of a dream I had the other night—or, better, a vision, for I feel it was sent as a message to show us the right way.

I dreamed that I took your hand as you were saying good-bye to me outside the house, and led you up the steps. "I want you to see my flowers," I said, and you followed me into the conservatory. Then I slipped away and going to the piano in the other room, began softly to play, "Rest, ye traveler, on your weary way!"—a favorite of mama's.

And then I heard mama come down the stairs and go in and join you, and I sang "The Rosary," and my heart sang, too, for I had brought you together again.

"How exquisitely droll!" Mrs. Whittemore commented.

"Droll? That's what I thought at first, but it's beginning to frighten me."

"But, my dear boy, she can't *make* you go back unless you want to."

"Oh, can't she?" He eyed her gloomily. "You should know better than anyone how little able I am to resist a woman. If that girl once starts to bully me, I'm lost. It may be morbid, but in regard to my wife—and

Viola's just like her—I'm a Calvinist. I feel that my course is laid down by them irrespective of my own volition. Two years of married life destroyed my belief in the doctrine of free will."

How much of serious intent lay back of his whimsical exaggerations might have been more apparent to Jane Whittemore had she heard an ejaculation that escaped him as he paused on the Pont d'Ambassadeur and looked down at the silvery ribbon of the Seine stretching away, dark-flanked, to the west, where the setting sun was banked about with brilliant banners of cloud and overlaid with long horizontal streaks of the city's smoky vapors.

"It's all my accursed sense of duty," he said. "I'm always wanting to do the right thing—where did I get that righteous streak? But I won't go"—he shook his gold-headed cane at the glowing west where lay America—"I won't, and nothing can persuade me—so there."

Three weeks later Gerry Clayboro was on board ship bound for New York. He had closed his affairs—sold his little house in the rue de Rennes, and having said good-bye to the friends and associations of half a lifetime, he watched the rocky promontory of Cherbourg fade in the distance, its outlines blurred in part, perhaps by a mist that lay nearer his eyes.

He had sworn that he would not go back to Madison avenue, that nothing his strong-willed wife could do would move him. But Mrs. Clayboro had always found a way, and in their last grand struggle she had beaten him again.

A cablegram of two weeks before had apprised him of her death, and talking it over with Mrs. Whittemore he found that she concurred in his opinion that it would be necessary for him to return to his native country and take charge of his daughter and her affairs.

"Of course it is your duty," she said with the usual feminine inflexibility on points ethical. "Someone's got to look after the child and she evidently takes it for granted herself that you

will assume the rôle of parent and guide."

"Parent and guide"—there may have been something faintly malicious in the words; at any rate, they haunted Gerry with an insistent reminder of his own inadequacy.

Lying in his deck-chair—he was a very bad sailor—he felt that the pulse in his throbbing head had taken up their repetition, and he saw them shining forth expectantly from his daughter's tear-laden eyes as she waited for him on the dock—a disquietingly pathetic little black figure that truthfully slipped an arm through his.

"I won't bother about the luggage this evening—let's go home," he said.

"Oh, no, it means a waste of time coming down tomorrow," rejoined Viola, with a miraculous briskness, and the swift transition recalled a voice from his past.

"A challenge to your wife's capabilities means an instant disposal of sentiment——"

He remembered, too, the reply he had been unable to resist.

"Quite true—if you mean the sentiment of others."

The domestic machinery of the Madison avenue house rolled on, as domestic machinery must, prompted by physical needs, with the relentless progression of Juggernaut.

Mrs. Clayboro's end was no doubt cheered by the reflection of how much they would miss her—and death's worst sting would have been in knowing what little difference her supervision of the cook really made.

Viola, who now did the ordering, made no question of her father's possible preferences or prejudices. The daily routine seemed a thing to be as little disturbed by the advent of one parent as by the loss of another. They still sat down to Mrs. Clayboro's favorite delicacies, partaking of them at the hour and in the seasons that her fancy had dictated.

Perhaps, indeed, it would have consoled that lady for the undisturbed smoothness with which the establishment ran to reflect that she had so per-

fecting its organization as to be still felt by it, guiding with Viola's vicarious hand the levers of the household economy.

Mr. Clayboro voluntarily furnished his daughter with a menu of the dishes he preferred, and mildly suggested that dinner should be at night instead of midday.

"Mother always thought it very unhealthy to eat a heavy meal in the evening," declared Viola with an air of unquestionable finality. "But I'll have a more substantial supper for you if you can't, as you say, eat heartily at one o'clock."

It was the answer to everything—"Mother had always said," and Gerry Clayboro felt that he was again passing under the yoke of his wife's will. He found himself unconsciously complying with demands he had long forgotten—that had left no more definite recollection than a vague sense of restraint—and on several occasions he had paused involuntarily at the drawing-room door and tossed his cigarette into the jardinière before entering.

But if his wife had ruled against his smoking cigarettes in her own rooms, his daughter, he was soon to discover, ruled against his smoking cigarettes at all.

She used the most modern weapons, too, in their little encounter, advancing hygienic reasons backed by a formidable array of statistics, where her mother would have wielded the primitive bludgeon of personal prejudice.

Gerry discovered in her a certain facile speciousness that Mrs. Clayboro had lacked, and which was indeed quite probably a gift from himself.

Satisfied as he had at first been with the sweeping generalization of "her mother's child," he began to remark other qualities that it gave him a quaint pleasure in tracing to his own endowment. One of the most marked of these was the idealism that perversely enough seemed to strengthen rather than temper the rigid Puritanism of his daughter's character. She would accept no compromises, and the half-way measures which her mother's

unhampered practicality had devised were spurned with all a zealot's fervor. Gerry Clayboro had railed in the days of his first subjugation against his wife's inflexibility, but he realized now that the term had been misapplied. She had not been inflexible, but simply strong-willed. She had—making due allowance for human frailty—known when to slacken the rein, and this allowance was very generously increased, as she unceasingly reminded him, for the scant admittance of her husband.

But while there had been this catholic quality in her restrictions, Viola was a true daughter of her "Bible and brimstone" ancestors. Gerry's wife had been content with turning him loose in the narrow paddock of her general beliefs and principles, but Viola's convictions were veritable hobbies, and once one was applied she strove to fix another with all the ruthless enthusiasm of youth.

"She is," declared her father sentimentously, addressing the remark to his mirror, "of the stuff that makes martyrs—of other people."

It was not long after Gerry had taken to every-day pipes and a Sunday cigar—grudgingly admitted as a step to complete renunciation—that the horizon was brightened by the smiling advent of young Dick Wood.

Dick was fresh from the Beaux-Arts, and the six or seven years' residence in Paris implied by his possession of the coveted "Diplome" accounted for the rather exaggerated bagginess of his trousers, the careful trim of his curly chestnut beard and the careless trim of his wavy chestnut hair.

He was boyish enough in his big, good-looking, good-humored way to make this aping of things Gallic quite tolerable, and his enthusiasms were so unmistakably genuine that it was a matter for congratulation to find his Americanism asserting itself in an abhorrence of the common artistic cant, rather than in conventional avoidance of the harmless conceits of costume and appearance.

He had a disarming faculty—a frank

desire to please—that assisted him in his rather blundering social progress and served to heighten his likeness to a big, boisterous puppy. He was expressive, too, in voicing his pleasure, and the overshot superlatives with which he greeted Gerry admitted no question of his sincerity in the evident inadequacy of all words to express emotional warmth.

"Do you remember that day we all went to the picnic to Fontainebleau Forest?" he queried under the reminiscent influence of a bottle of Burgundy. "And the night at Bullis's? I shall never forget the way those two Spanish girls danced, and old Prévôt climbed upon the stage and tried to foot it, too. . . . By the way, have you heard that old Prévôt is married?—really and truly cross-his-heart married."

Mr. Clayboro cast a furtive, anxious glance at his daughter sitting in virginal high-necked white at the other end of the table. The little dimple-like hollow just below her cheek marked the closed set of her jaw, and there was a faint crease between her straight, dark brows.

He turned and strove rather feverishly to direct his friend's vagrant memories toward more general topics—the school riots, Berliet's first painting and the fire in Gezah's atelier when all the men rushed in and saved their drawings except a little Swiss, who had been picked as the "Grand Prix" winner.

But Dick dropped each subject as it was presented to him. He was determinedly personal.

"Mrs. Whittemore hasn't been the same woman since you went away," he declared; "she admits it herself, and wails that you haven't even left her the decent comfort—or comfortable decency, was it?—of widow's weeds."

Gerry's limp French shirt crumpled into deeper folds as he sank down into his braided dress-coat.

"Mrs. Whittemore and all the rest of you are very good to miss me," he murmured.

Gerry was lost for the remainder of

the evening in an uneasy speculation as to how far his daughter's comments would probably extend, but after a very frigid good night she contented herself with the request that he should never invite Mr. Wood to call again.

"He's not so bad," her father defended, busying himself with the window-fastening. "You'd find he's a good, sterling fellow after you once know him." He laid emphasis on "sterling"—it had been one of Mrs. Clayboro's favorite words.

"I think he is a most objectionable man, and if I am to be left to protect myself from listening to such subjects as he dwelt on tonight, I must at least beg that you entertain him at your club, and not here."

Gerry bowed his head in mild acquiescence. "It shall be as you say, my dear." He felt that this was getting to be the formula of his existence.

But though Dick learned that no one was at home when he paid his dinner-call, his visits did not forthwith stop, for the reason that it never occurred to him he might not be wanted. He was used to welcomes, and he entertained little doubt that the Madison avenue door was on the latch for him as hospitably as the bright, white-painted *porte* had always been at the house in the rue de Rennes.

As it happened, his perseverance was not put to a severe test. On the occasion of his second call Miss Clayboro chanced to come down the stair while he was fishing for a visiting-card.

He promptly crammed the case in his pocket and came forward beaming, with a large, white-gloved hand outstretched. "The maid tells me your father is out: so I was just hoping you'd be kind enough to come and cheer me up—I'm still rather lonely and homesick for Paris, you know."

Her frigid politeness might have proved more effectual if he himself had not been in such an inextinguishable glow of sociability.

"Father is at home, I am sure," she said with a patient, sacrificing truthfulness that should have served as a

rebuke to the servant who had just executed her instructions.

It did not seem to occur to Viola that she could retreat to the drawing-room or her own luxurious study, and she sat rigidly erect on the edge of a chair, an eloquent protest against the visitor's evident disposition to settle down for the evening.

It appeared, however, as if the whole range of suggestion was inaudible to Dick's low-pitched perceptions, and Gerry, aware with an almost physical discomfort of his daughter's irradiating hostility, carried the young man off to the club.

There Scotch-and-soda, the sure password to those closets where family skeletons lie concealed, once again proved its ability to push aside the strongest guards of reticence. Gerry unburdened himself to his friend.

"Divorce?" he said, for that was the subject upon which they had struck. "Of course, I believe in divorce, and I don't see why it should be limited to the marriage relation, either. The law ought to relieve one from all galling ties—a divorce from a brutal parent, or yet more brutal parent-in-law; a divorce from hoggish prodigal brothers who dissipate their own patrimony and then come back to share yours. We should be able to obtain a legal separation from maiden aunts who 'visit round' among their relatives: and lastly we ought to be protected by due process of law from the persecutions and oppressions of our own children."

Dick laughed. "You think it the panacea for all domestic tyrannies?"

"Of course. As long as the bear is on a chain his master will kick and hammer the poor beast to his heart's content—that is, if the bear's claws have been filed. But with the possibility of his unchained bread-winner taking to the woods at any time, self-interest will induce the kind treatment that humane considerations could not."

"The simile is a good one for those who have married not wisely but too well," agreed Dick. "Yet the bear is a strong animal and not likely to be bullied by any except his master."

Gerry shook his head and, leaning forward, helped himself to another cigarette.

"You are young," he said, with a gracious flourish of the little white cylinder, "otherwise you would know that life is one long spectacle of the baiting of the strong by the weak. Women in particular are brazenly unscrupulous in exploiting the chivalry of those they maltreat. You may argue that man is not dependent—he has only to put on his hat; but the fact remains that unless maddened to desperation we all of us cling pathetically to the hand that holds the whip: you may argue that I—by way of illustration—can shout down my daughter and even spank her and lock her in her room; but the fact remains that I eat dinner at noon and smoke cigarettes on the sly like a schoolboy."

Dick nodded thoughtfully. "I was wondering how you managed to stand it—awfully sweet girl and all that, but she hasn't been properly brought up."

"Sh!" whispered Gerry. "Don't say that; you'll make her mother turn in her grave. Her every energy was devoted to Viola's proper bringing-up. She knew how to manage her, too," he added wistfully. "When I first met Viola she was helpless—never took a step unaided, or so much as had a thought of her own. She had literally been carried all her life and didn't know she could walk by herself. But after she was handed over to me I found her rather a weight, so in an evil moment I put her down and gave her my hand. It was then that she found her powers—was completely carried away. In fact, by the exuberant realization of her own strength, while now, bless you, she still has my hand—in a vise-like grip and is leading me with measured tread down what she calls the 'slope of life.'"

Dick, who evidently felt the subject to be a delicate one, offered no further comment, but as they were saying good night he laid a hand on the elder man's arm.

"Don't worry; girls will be girls," he said. "They all pass through the

convent stage and she'll be all right after she's sown her wildly religious oats. However," he concluded reflectively, "if she gets too unendurable, either spank her or put on your hat and leave her to her tantrums."

"What?" cried Gerry, mockingly aghast. "You wouldn't have me desert my child—I, her natural protector and guide?"

If Dick's perceptions were after all more acute than he generally led people to believe, the fact that he was not welcomed by Miss Clayboro did not in the least deter him from constant visits at what he always thought of as "her" house.

Her hostility, to be sure, was apparently so far mitigated as to take now the form of tolerant indifference. Her attitude no longer suggested that she could not be comfortable while he remained under the same roof with her, but she usually read during his visits, and if she chanced to meet him on her afternoon drive, she bowed unsmilingly as though it were less a recognition of his being an acquaintance than of her being a lady.

Once he encountered her at a dance and wrote his name down for a waltz. Then, noting the sparsely filled order—she seemed to know surprisingly few people—he asked if he might have a two-step as well. He rather admired her for her coldly polite refusal.

She was alone in the library one evening when he was ushered in, and, prompted perhaps by the rather curt response to his greeting, he turned on her with a penetrating directness that was, no doubt, intended to disconcert her.

"I have two questions I should like to put to you."

She raised her calm gaze to his. She had been so polite, upon his entrance, as to lay her book face downward in her lap.

"Why do you dislike me?"

If he had hoped to disturb her equanimity he was disappointed.

"I don't dislike you," she answered evenly.

"No," he reflected, "I don't believe

you do—now, but why don't you like me?"

"I'm generally behind in the fashions—for I suppose it is a fashion, since you're so keenly alive to its absence."

He had really not suspected this. It was her father's ironical wit with something more of deliberate intention and less, perhaps, of the harmless vanity in a well-timed phrase.

"What is your other question?"

He laughed boyishly.

"No, no! my head's still ringing. Besides, the other one is sheer impudent meddling with what doesn't concern me."

"Oh—you mean my father?"

He remained silent.

"I see you do. Please go on, Mr. Wood."

He shifted uncomfortably under her steady gaze.

"I insist, sir, upon hearing what you were going to say about my father."

"It wasn't about your father," he lied in sheer desperation.

Her unmoving glance accused him as directly as would the spoken word.

"It wasn't, really," he affirmed quite miserably. "I'll ask you the other question at—at some other time, Miss Viola."

She relaxed, still viewing him suspiciously, and then Gerry came in providentially and relieved the situation.

"Do you know" he said to Dick when punctually at half-past ten his daughter bade them good night, "do you know what that girl is trying to make me do?"

Dick shook his head despondently.

"She is trying to make me go into politics," went on Gerry impressively. "She insists on my attending the primaries and all that—as though it weren't enough that she has me in the 'Society for the Suppression of Vice,' where I give funds and the support of my name to prurient-minded busybodies who swaddle the infant arts of our country according to their own bourgeois notions of morality and modesty."

"Huh—Life's penances are appropriate," growled his unfeeling friend.

"*Et tu, Brute* " The tone achieved the acme of reproach. "I suppose you'll also agree with her argument. She said she wanted *her* father to leave a name behind him as something better than an epicure and raconteur."

"That was rather rubbing it in," admitted Dick.

"Yes, and when I replied that perhaps I should go in for politics some day—when I was older, she looked at me for a moment and said, 'Well, really, father, you'd better hurry up.'"

Dick wagged his head. "She isn't properly managed."

"Managed!" rejoined the father tartly. "I'd like to give you the job of managing her for a while."

"I wish you could," Dick rejoined, with a sigh, as he rose to go.

Gerry Clayboro had several times suggested a European trip to his daughter, but she invariably negatived the idea with uncompromising firmness.

"You've been out of the country quite enough, papa. It's the duty of the best people to stay here and aid in its development."

"That's very good of you, my dear, but I'm so lacking in assurance—I've never been *quite* certain that I am one of the best people."

"I was referring to education and position."

"You should have been a British Tory, Viola. But even at that I'm not very well educated. I went through college, it's true, in much the way that a circus rider goes through a paper hoop. I speak French and Italian and I can order a meal in German—though I never like to; but the East Side is full of linguists."

His specious arguments, however, made little impression upon Viola, and so he was left to flatten his nose—as he expressed it—against the windows of the steamship offices. He did cast very wistful glances in at the open door of one of the tourist agencies that he frequently passed in his strolls down Broadway. Sometimes when the thought of Mrs. Whittemore's cozy little drawing-room and graceful gossip

grew particularly tantalizing, or when a new field of useful endeavor had been discovered for his dormant activities, he had to drag himself past that open door like the reformed drunkard who catches a whiff from a bar-room. In more sober moments he could trust himself to pause and look over the array of foreign notes and money in the window—at the highly-colored prints of leviathan liners plowing majestically through a roadstead filled with the pigmy craft of other lines.

"I daren't venture on West street," he confided to Dick. "I'm afraid I'd rush aboard the first out-bound boat I saw."

"And Miss Viola wants you to stay here and work?"

"Yes, hard labor is a sentence that only Russians combine with banishment, but Viola has more than a Slavic severity."

There was a slight pause, and then Dick looked up with a sudden determination.

"If you'll let me say so, Mr. Clayboro, I'm beginning to think that you neither understand nor appreciate your daughter."

It was not the only occasion when Dick made observations of a similar trend, and these might in some measure have prepared Gerry for what was coming. Yet that idea, even if it had been suggested to him, he would have laughed to scorn as wildly preposterous.

So it was that when the light was turned in upon him it left him blinded, stupefied, incredulous.

"You don't mean you're in love with my daughter, Dick?"

"I do mean just that," the young architect repeated rather wearily. "Is it so very surprising?"

"My dear boy, it's grotesque."

"She's very pretty, very clever, and she has marvelous force of character," declared Dick rather indignantly. "I'm really a bit tired, Mr. Clayboro, of hearing your constant disparagements of her."

"I don't want to disparage her," Gerry assured him. "She's all you say—her mother was before her, but I'd so

come to look upon you as my ally—not against Viola," he hastened to add, "but against the triumphant feminine society which she represents. Besides, at the risk of being rude, I'm afraid you won't find her very responsive. She looks upon you as my confederate in iniquitous frivolities."

Dick glanced up, his brow furrowed anxiously.

"Has she ever said anything?"

"Not since the evening you first dined with us."

The young man looked relieved. "That's not so bad; but do you give me your good wishes for my venture?"

Dick might have found in the answer some measure of the warm regard in which he was held.

"No; I give you my permission—if indeed, you'd grown sufficiently French to wait for it; but I do even this largely because I rely very surely upon Viola's perception of how unsuited for each other you both are."

It gave Gerry a whimsical glow of self-satisfaction to pretend that he had really been asked for his daughter's hand and had refused it. The only drawback, if such had indeed been the case, would be his inability to point out to Viola the nobility of his action.

Dick had said that he was not going to remain much longer in suspense, and while Gerry's knowledge of his daughter would not allow him to share in this nerve-teasing uncertainty, he waited with considerable impatience for some sign or sound of the plunge.

When this evidence did come it was in a purely negative form. The dive made no audible splash, but the diver disappeared, leaving his belongings—in the shape of a few books and an umbrella—behind him.

So far as his daughter was concerned Gerry could discern no trace of the event—for he knew that such it must surely have been—either in the calm, regular countenance or calmer and still more regular manner.

Finally, after almost a full month had elapsed since Dick's last visit, curiosity prompted him to introduce the subject.

"Dick Wood hasn't been here for some time," he remarked.

"No, I asked him not to come again."

"Ah-h!" her father nodded, his gaze bent upon the fire. "I said I thought you would."

"Did he speak to you?" Her voice sounded surprise.

"Yes, he told me he was going to try and take you off—take you away from me, that is."

Viola rose and, coming behind him, leaned over the back of his chair. The firelight was casting a ruddy glow on her father's gray hair and fitfully illuminating their reflection in the long French mirror opposite. It was just such a tableau as she loved.

"No one shall ever do that, daddy," she said with a reassuring emphasis.

"Wait till you're in love, my dear."

But Gerry repeated the time-honored warning with the air of vague deference to a conventional superstition.

The envy which had always tempered Viola's compassion when she read of her favorite martyrs would have been small indeed had their crowns remained invisible.

"I *am* in love," she said.

"In love with whom?" He was mechanically responding to her sentimental mood. He waited rather wearily for her to spring her little trap.

"With Dick," said Viola.

He had been astonished at his friend's confession; his daughter's left him speechless.

"Dick-Wood," he murmured, "Dick-Wood," as though he were driving the words against his rebellious senses. And then his thought took a strange leap; if he could only tell this to Jane; and he realized with a sudden delicious pang that the words need no longer be the old, hopeless repetition. He soon would be telling her.

"I am glad, my dear," he hastened to respond; "Dick will be just the man for you."

"But you forget, father—I have refused him."

True—he *had* forgotten. The bright

vision of Paris vanished with the rosy mist that had held the mirage.

Perhaps in the silence that followed she read his thoughts. She bent her head close down by his.

"I knew you needed me, father, though I wasn't quite sure that *you* knew you did, so I told Dick that however much I cared for him I felt my duty bound me to you—that I couldn't leave you to spend your declining years lonely, among strangers."

Gerry Clayboro stiffened in his daughter's clasp.

"You did this for me?"

"For you and for mother. I *know* she would say I am right, so I am anchored to a rock—nothing you can say can move me."

"But, my dear child, noble though this is of you, I can't—I absolutely refuse to allow you to exchange your happiness and Dick's for—for mine."

Her arms tightened about him in a filial embrace. They felt to Gerry Clayboro like bands of steel closing him in forever. A voice whispered in his ear, and perhaps because he could not see her face it was no longer the voice of his daughter, but one he had heard often in that same room years and years ago.

"You—can't—stop—me!" There was a sacrificial exultation in the tone. "I am stronger than you are!"

It was the final challenge to his manhood. They had known it perhaps all along, but neither of them had ever dared say it before.

He started up, struggling from her arms, and dropped the glasses she had substituted for his monocle.

"You are not!" He ground his heel on the broken fragments as though they were symbolical. "You are not—I'll show you I am strong, too. I'll show you I can make sacrifices, too—I am going straight to the 'phone and call up Dick, and you must take him. It's the one wish your *old* father has."

But Viola had risen to meet him. That intrepid handful of Pilgrims who had consigned whole tribes of heathens to a deserved perdition had bred a stalwart stock.

"Say what you will, father, my course is set. I know I am doing right."

"Viola, you must."

"Never—my father, never."

There was but one hope left, and Gerry took it with a blind faith in ultimate justice. If there was any way in which he might be repaid for his bondage in full, it was in the efficacy of his final appeal.

There was a solemn pause as they stood facing each other, triumph already gleaming from the girl's eyes.

"In your dead mother's name, I command it!"

The triumph faded with the echo of his words, and her eyes met his for a moment—then wavered. She glanced back at the stern face with a furtive new-born respect, then—from sheer nervous excitement, perhaps—fell weeping into a chair.

"Now, remember, you're not to hang on with an interminable engage-

ment," Gerry said that night as they were all gathered round the dinner-table. "I'm going to present you with this house for a wedding present, and I shall settle a proper allowance upon Viola——"

"Dear old daddy," his daughter responded, patting the hand that lay near her, "you might almost think he was anxious to get rid of his one responsibility," and she smiled across at her fiancé. "But then, daddy," she added, beaming affectionately back at him, "you're not going to lose me, you know. Dick and I settled it just now that you are to live with us always."

There was a new-found determination in the set of Gerry Clayboro's jaw as he drew out his pocket-case, extracted an envelope and produced from that in turn a long folded slip that he pushed across the table toward them.

"I've booked my passage right through to Paris!" he proclaimed triumphantly.



FOR WHOM?

By Edith M. Thomas

FOR whom those color-beams we cannot see—
 The under-red—the over-violet?
 For whom the tones that none hath listened yet,
 No player yet enthralled in melody?

Those unheard waves of sweetness wander free,
 They rise round strings that muted are, to them!
 Those beams of color, mute in flower or gem—
 They cross our path, on unseen errantry!

The teasing Fancy vainly makes her plea,
 The eager Sense no clue to these may trace.
 Shut with the treasures of mysterious space,
 They are not for such mortal men as we.

For whom? Who, then, shall turn, at length, the key,
 And wander into Beauty we forego? . . .
 I dream, those tones shall sound, those colors glow,
 For men of subtler sense—men yet to be!

MANNERS, MONEY AND MORALS

By Edgar Saltus

LIFE, which used to be a sealed book, has become an open newspaper. There may be privacy in the backwoods—there is none elsewhere, not even on the back stars. Nowadays nebulae are photographed, and probably enjoy it. As it is in the heavens, so has it become on earth. A perceptible variation in the social barometer is the result. Time was when society's chief office consisted in forcing the affiliated into a strait-jacket of set rules. Whatever one's stature a condition of mixed negativeness ensued. The process had its advantages. In dwarfing it polished; in stultifying it restrained. People manacled in camisoles of stupid customs could not, it is true, jump in and save the drowning, particularly if they had not been previously introduced, but at least they were prevented from popping out at you from every sheet in the land. The process had, therefore, its advantages. Perhaps, too, it had its defects. Yet it is permissible to wonder whether the latter are not to be preferred to the indecencies of today.

"What has surprised you most in the States?" a local reporter asked a junketing foreigner. "The universal rudeness," was the prompt reply.

The reply, though prompt, was not exact. In these regions civility is not entirely absent. Enter a broker's office and the courtesy with which you are received will be charming. Elsewhere the supply may perhaps be scant. But that is because of national straightforwardness. The essence of good manners is dissimulation. Arguments bore, accidents annoy. Confronted by either or both, well-bred beings mask their weariness with a

smile. A terrible creature buttonholed Hook. "What's going on?" he asked. In a tone that was silken in its sweetness Hook answered: "I am." From another monster Disraeli escaped by murmuring, with that air for which he was famous: "You really must not let me monopolize you."

Good breeding, unfortunately, does not necessarily comport wit. If it did our regret at its scarcity would be infinitely more poignant. What it does comport is serenity, the recognition, conscious or otherwise, of the fact that everything happens because it had to happen and could not happen differently. Though the roof fall, a gentleman does not get in a funk or a gentlewoman out of countenance. As for fusses, it is only the ingenuous that make them. It is only primitive natures that get angry and only candid souls that are rude. "Sir," said Boswell in the course of one of his corkscrew interrogatories, "how would you feel if you were locked in a tower with a baby?" "Sir," answered Johnson, "I could not be more vilely distressed than I am." Johnson was delightfully frank. A young person whom Sydney Smith encountered at dinner was just the reverse. At this dinner the host carved. While he was at it his arm slipped, or he did. As a result those present counted three distinct rills of animal juice trickling down that girl's neck, and yet she swore that not a drop had touched her. There was the triumph of civilized life, the supreme display of serene dissimulation. It is its rarity, perhaps, which makes rudeness a trifle noticeable in our otherwise admirably conducted lives.

Here endeth the first lesson.

The second concerns the rudeness itself. Clearly it is not indigenous. The graces of colonial New York were exceeded if at all only by the charm of Southern gentility. Morals indeed our forefathers may not have held in the same high esteem that we hold them, and no doubt money with them was equally scarce. But at least in manner they were gallant and in costume superb. They dressed, addressed and digressed in a fashion superiorly correct. The Puritans left rather more to be desired. There was no waste of sugar in their crab-apple sauce. Yet at least they were not vulgar. It is not from them that contemporaneous indecencies proceed. Nor would it be profitable to assume that these are relapses to customs of the Skraelings—the glacial folk who were the original social leaders hereabouts—for we know so little concerning them that it is tedious to attempt to know less. Then there are—or were—the Indians and also the Dutch. But with the loftiness of the former, Cooper bored us inhumanly. With the urbanity of the latter, Irving wearied us, if possible, still more. It follows, therefore, or seems to follow, that local vulgarity not having been naturally transmitted must be a trait acquired through influences at once modern and malign.

In seeking to trace these influences, we would, were this country a monarchy, turn to the King. For in monarchies it is the sovereign always by whom the standard of manners is set. Yet when, as has occurred, the executive has no manners whatever, or else plenty of them and all of them bad—in circumstances such as these the tone of society is apt to be blatant and its conduct rude. But as we have no sovereign, at least not yet, the cause of local vulgarity must reside elsewhere; in the climate, perhaps, which appears to have changed and not for the better, though a careless psychology might attribute it indifferently to business cares and demon cars. People diabolically projected lack the time to be civil, and those past whom they flash are equally deficient in opportunities to requite their

absence of salaams. Parallely, those whose vocation is commercial must, at the risk of bankruptcy, be cinematographs of aggressiveness and push. In conditions of this character the amenities go by the board, and once the amenities over it would take pearl-divers to get them back. Multiply these conditions as continuously these conditions are being multiplied, and it would be curious were anything else than a bear garden the result. But there is another factor, the most potent of any, the volcano of coin that has been erupting on parterres new and still crude.

Concerning coin we could write on our knees. Only recently we made a pilgrimage to the Metropolitan Museum that we might behold a gold piece in a case. It seemed to us sacrosanct, a rare and holy thing, the emblem of the Pratscha-Parâmita—which is Pali for peace perfect, perpetual and perfumed. In its presence we realized that, given a sufficiency of such tokens, we could reproduce the wishing cap and magician's wand, rule this world and even a portion of the next, for with money enough any poet could found a new religion, that of Harmony, and why not?

Money, therefore, because of its potential sorceries, all artistic people regard with awe. Unhappily we are not yet an artistic people, the consequence being that money here, instead of inducing, as it has in the East, a beautiful worship of the uniquely restful, serves only to make its possessors intimately convinced that they are in a position to tell anybody to go to the devil.

Arrogance so involved and subtle may not be appreciated, at least by the many, but among the sunetoi, the connoisseurs, it appears to be recognized as distinctly the thing. In the exercise of that gastronomy of the eye which consists in observing smart people, we have noticed that it has become usual to distribute airs of profound contempt for everybody, to give the impression that the ground is not fit for your feet, to decline to be aware that there is anything but chairs and tables about and

to answer curtly those who presume to address you, provided indeed that you condescend to answer at all.

These elegancies, the outward and visible signs of extreme culture, are indicative, or meant to be, of membership in the raffish club that society is, which itself, made up of pretty peacocks, high hats, orris, delicate anecdotes and tobacco smoke, savors of everything except goodness. But to be good is inexpensive. To be bad requires a large income. In spite of the President, or perhaps just to spite him, modern society is very well off. It is not close-fisted, either, and, a general idea to the contrary notwithstanding, it is ingratiatingly open-armed.

The fact may seem unimportant. So it is. But it is difficult to fancy the number of imbeciles to whom society represents a fairyland that they are permitted to read of, but from whose witcheries they are debarred. That is because they are imbeciles. Admission is easy. The sesame is sense. But that is a thing that imbeciles never possess. If they did they would realize how slight are society's exactions.

Society used to require birth. It does so no longer. It used to require breeding. That, too, it let go. In a remote era it required brains. At present society does not care to think. But it likes to hear. Particularly, something scandalous. If you have something scandalous to say and can say it amusingly, you are welcome. Then, if you elect to linger, coin is indicated. For society, which loves to be amused, loves also to be fed. If to a rattling good story you can add a topping good dinner and keep it up, there is not a valid reason why you should not settle down among the enchantments of the land.

Elsewhere the severity of these requirements is tempered. In Vienna you must have quarterings and need have nothing else, not even vivacity, which in the Faubourg is disliked and in London is discountenanced. In Vienna and the Faubourg money is not an essential. In London it is well to have a little. If you have much you

may sit practically in any chair except the throne, provided always that you are colorless and well groomed. Color is not a recognized entrée at a London dinner. When acceptable at all, it is only in the stalls or in the more convenient theatre which fiction is. Anywhere else it is an intrusion, in addition to being an infraction of the general Mayfair rule against animation and bringing oneself into view. "Do you know," a fond American mother confided to an unsympathetic ear, "my daughter has got so that she talks quite like an Englishwoman." "She does not talk at all, then," was the ungracious reply.

Even so, the difference between not talking at all and talking about nothing, which is the endearing custom of smart women here, hardly constitutes an embarrassment of choice, though to what these phenomena are due is beyond us, unless, indeed, the cis-Atlantic variety may be attributed to the climate, which, while accountable for so much else, has at least endowed our country with its healthy moral tone. Blatant we may be, rude we certainly are, but ethically we are models. Yet even there we are not extremists. We have our diversions. Divorce is one of them.

Divorce is a national sport. Those who dislike the game take a severe satisfaction in reading about it. For the ordinary romps of common people no one of course cares a rap. But given an account of uncivil proceedings in the upper circles and general enjoyment results. Given two accounts and football is less exciting. For among our best people it is regarded as entirely correct to marry, divorce and marry again. But not oftener. Those who go down for the third time are regarded as forever lost. There are even casuists who go so far as to say that once is enough. That, however, is a very advanced view.

What divorces are to us, elopements are to Europeans. The fashion, set by Helen of Troy, tumbled down the terraces of time into almost absolute disuse until revived, some years since,

by a princess who executed a fugue with a fiddler. Before the public had fully caught the lilt of the capriccio, an infanta eloped with a painter. Since then in almost every realm high-nesses have been taking the bull by the horns and trotting off with him to Paris.

To determine the influences at work in these women one would have to look into anatomy, beyond it into psychology, more remotely still into the recesses of the feminine heart. It is there the causes lie, wrapped in a syllogism at once complex and simple, in the fact, undeniable yet rarely admitted, that nothing earthly has ever prevented a woman from having the fantasies, temptations and impulses of her sex.

Against these impulses the most potent restraint is a sense of humor. Principles are excellent, they are palisades. But palisades may be scaled. Temperaments garrisoned by humor are fortresses that never capitulate, never at least to anything low. The temperament of Helen of Troy could not have been of that kind. Yet what she lacked in humor she made up in Homer. The bard so drenched her escapade with blood and beauty that only poetry remained. For modern Helens there are no Homers. Only Paris still invites.

In comparison with elopements, therefore, the diversions of our national sport acquire a savor of almost entire gentility. They are reprehensible none

the less. The pulpit condemns them, philosophy as well. Yet inasmuch as everybody marries—everybody, that is, except a few foolish women and a few very wise men, necessarily, from this very profusion of matrimony some discord must result. A clergyman stated recently that a woman must have a poor nature who does not, after marriage, reveal qualities that her husband had not included in his conception of her gifts. The statement is unquestionable. Many a man has discovered himself married to a lady to whom he had never been introduced. It is on such surprises that Sioux Falls was built. On the other hand, the chief charm of marriage being the opportunity which it affords for saying disagreeable things, an entirely harmonious ménage might be rather dull.

But that is a very material view, in addition to being an incorrect one. Harmony is nature's first law. When it becomes the first law of man, instead of being, as it now is, his last consideration, it is safe to predict that rudeness, vulgarity and blatancy will have had their day and, with humor for comrade, peace will nestle in the lacework of our souls. It is safe to predict also that such a consummation will be the billennium. Probably the world will never free itself from the strait-jacket of customs which, whether old or new, are always stupid and which among them have, for the present, contrived to make manners, money and morals what they are.



HIS POSITION

"**L**IFE is not all beer and skittles," musingly said the tall-browed, dreamy-eyed person.

"No, suh!" promptly replied Colonel Begad. "I care very little for beer, suh; and, as for skittles, whatevuh they may be, I have nevuh drank any of 'em in my whole life."

THE MASTER SINGS

By Ludwig Lewisohn

THE master disdained to go near the piano or glance at the score. He stood in the centre of the room, his attitude, his eyes, the very edges of his golden beard emitting a rich consciousness of innumerable triumphs. The voice that floated on the air was still strong, still sonorous, still full of dramatic power, but its softer modulations betrayed, despite the adroitest management, the hoarse roughening of age. He sang, however, not with his voice alone, but with his whole personality, with a sense of its almost miraculous appropriateness to the Wagnerian rôles:

*"Dir toene Lob, die Wunder sei'n gepriesen
Die deiner Huld entspriesen. . . ."*

It was the authentic voice, the authentic figure of the Germanic knight and poet. The song ended and the master turned away with a pathetic light shining in his blue eyes. From divans along the walls women fluttered toward him. They knew the tragedy of his life, they had heard the epic of his battle with hostile impresarios. White hands were stretched out toward him; eyes filled with limpid tears; there were murmuring voices that rose like faint perfumes.

"It was divine . . . you never sang more grandly . . . you must take our poor thanks."

But he waved all admiration gently aside. He took the hand of a young girl of luxuriously oriental coloring and almost inaudibly pronounced her name, "Sara!" Then, still holding her hand, he spoke aloud:

"Kinder, you owe me no thanks. The song—it is here." He patted

his broad chest. "Beyond the vocal cords . . . in the soul. I shall sing my best songs—hereafter."

His form drooped, his golden beard rested upon his bosom, a shadow hid the scantiness of the hair on his heroic head.

The visitors went softly from the high, dim room. Only one remained, a blond and slender figure with passionate lips and nervous, musical hands. She turned to the master.

"Heinrich!"

He drew himself up with an admirable imitation of the fervor of youth.

"Geliebte!"

"Heinrich, I am sick of this concealment and the acting that it involves. My nerves are going to pieces. I cannot sing . . ."

She put a slender hand to her throat.

"It is the dimness before dawn," he said; "you will sing; we will sing together. From you my art will draw new strength."

She bit her lip.

"Heinrich, I know your lofty idealism, your devotion to art, your splendid forgetfulness of common things. But let me beseech you . . ."

He leaned his forehead wearily upon his hands.

"Yes, Frida."

"My position is becoming intolerable."

"Why?"

"I have the right to be with you always; to cut loose from much that irks me; you have given me the right. And I am constrained——"

"In the service of art."

"How does the concealment of our marriage serve art?"

He arose and paced the room. The erectness of his carriage was not achieved without a perceptible effort, but the result was leonine, lofty, superb.

"Frida, there are inner necessities, subtle and illusive. I have the eternal youth of the artist and at present much within me is striving toward a new birth. And art and love must triumph together—art, Frida, and love!"

"And that hour of triumph, when will it be?"

"Soon, Frida, soon. But it is yet upon the knees of the gods."

Frida felt tired and dispirited. She left the house and walked along the desolate twilight streets. The reddening leaves of the trees in Central Park drew her on with their mournful incantation. She lingered near them, conscious of the estranging Autumn in her own heart. She was nervous, lonely and filled with self-contempt. How could she permit those disloyal thoughts to obtain a mastery over her? How could she bear to have a soul so weak and faithless that it could not keep bright its central flame? How could she be so vulgar as to let Heinrich fall into the shadow of the flat normalities of life? She thought of those nights, blue, magical, scented, when, leaning over her, he had sung the "Dedication" of Franz to her:

*"Du gabst sie mir, ich geb sie wieder,
Kennst du die eignen Lieder nicht?"*

Had she, indeed, given him his songs? Had hers, indeed, been the power which had reawakened that ardor of his youth by which he had sung the world under his sway? How could she doubt it? But she doubted all things today—his sincerity and, what was almost more appalling, her own. For, of late, it seemed to her that she had watched Heinrich with colder eyes, that she had detected a factitiousness in his bearing, in his words, even in his singing voice; and, surely, love such as she had believed hers to be knew nothing of criticism, nothing of doubt; a love so consecrated by art, so filled with worship, could not live but by perfect faith. Only his refusal openly to acknowledge

their marriage—against that subtle injury she could not steel her heart. And yet, was he not old enough to be her father, was he not a great artist, could she not rest in his wisdom and abide his chosen hour? She could have done so freely but for these torturing doubts, but for this flickering of the flame of her devotion. By the last open step of irrevocable action she hoped to secure the integrity of her life and love. She thought of the long months of her boundless adoration of him, of how he had sung to her as he had sung to no other in all the years of the past, sung her heart, her soul, her senses into his keeping! Yes, faithlessness to him meant faithlessness to her own life.

If only Otto Saar, the master's son, would leave her in peace. If only he would not look at her with those laughing, clever eyes, softening, at times, into tenderness; if only he would not force her own eyes to turn always to the more dubious aspects of the master's personality. But she would not listen to more. The man's disloyalty to his father stamped him as untrustworthy; his contempt for art proved him incapable of any comprehension of the greater soul.

The dark fell and Frida shivered in the wind of the night. She must go home to the little flat on Lenox avenue and hear her mother's and father's tiresome account of their sordid affairs, and see the coarse lives led by her brother and sister. If she could have done any good there, communicated to that home any breath of her own spirit, she would not have been so bitter. But these stolid, materialized Germans, with their interests in odd clubs and societies, their homespun sentiment, their maddening delight in cheap and vulgar literature and music, really, she suspected, disdained her in their hearts. Fortunately, the flat, when she reached it, was quiet. One *Verein* or another had absorbed the family. She found her sandwiches of cheese and sausage and her bottle of beer carefully put aside in the dining-room. The fare typified the life that

was led here, and sitting at the table, her head upon her hands, Frida dreamed with the exaltation of old of Heinrich Saar, the master of her life and art.

II

UPON the next morning Otto Saar paid her one of his equivocal visits. She could not divine the purpose of his frequent appearances during which he seemed constantly on the point of some half-humorous, half-angry outburst. His words, as well as his silences, had something unwillingly reticent and evasive about them. Today, as usual, his tall, beautifully molded form, his virile glance, his ironical mouth refreshed her in a sharp yet pleasant way. He hardly greeted her.

"Was yesterday's adoration of the master a success?"

"Do you expect an answer to that question?"

"Why not? One may be frankly amused at one's father; one may also wish to induce a clearer vision in one's friend."

"But if one's father is a great man, and one's friend not at all blind?"

"A great man . . . a great man . . . ! Don't look so concerned. Wasn't I brought up in the faith? Didn't I despise myself during all my boyhood because I couldn't get myself to love art? Faugh! It wasn't the music that disgusted me."

"What was it?"

"The adoration, the incense, the airs and graces, the whole effeminate tomfoolery! Eternal twaddle about art and ideals and reforming the world through song. And the unpaid butcher around the corner, and the unpaid tailor and jeweler clamoring at the door! Champagne and female sympathy—external glitter and essential rottenness."

She arose, pale and trembling.

"You hurt me, Herr Saar, and all you say cannot shake my faith in the master."

He, too, got up, tall and commanding.

"Stay!" he cried. "This is too much. The majority of the women who fall under his influence are worthless enough, but you . . . ! I am tired of his superannuated conquests. You think him a great artist? Humph! He had one of the finest voices in the world and he ruined it by careless living and stubborn ignorance. He made an enemy of every impresario in Europe and America because he broke every contract, insulted every fellow-artist, never rehearsed, never worked, but dawdled away the precious years in foolish philandering and posing. And now, in his old age——"

"Old age?" she interrupted him. "He is in the best years of full artistic maturity."

"You've learned your lesson well, you little—fool. I know his phrases. *I'm* not so far from forty; *he's*—sixty-four. The golden Lohengrin beard, the magnificent teeth, the heroic form, the very voice—all are sham, tinsel, mockery."

It was a full minute before, by a despairing effort, she regained her voice.

"I must not listen to you. You do not understand him . . . believe me, I know him better than you, although you are his son. . . . I know. . . ."

"You?"

"I!"

"How? For the love of God!"

"Because I am—his wife."

The tall man turned white and grasped the back of a heavy chair. Then he laughed in an abandon of bitterness. She could not doubt his sincerity, his truth, and all the suspicions that she had thought disloyal arose with overwhelming force.

"How long have you been his wife?"

"Two months," she faltered, "but it is not yet to be announced."

"Of course not! He must wait for Sara Rosen's absence and—mine."

He looked her full in the face.

"You see, when my mother died I swore, for her sake, that no other woman should suffer as she did. The master has always required the sympathy of fair women."

She fell into a chair and hid her face. But she heard his heavy tramp as he paced the floor of the room. When he spoke again his voice was crisp, businesslike, abrupt.

"You must regain your freedom——"

"How?"

"On any charge. Something must be trumped up . . . something . . . anything. You are too young, too dear, too precious!" The clear voice broke.

A suspicion stirred in her heart.

"Is it because you—want me that you say——?"

"God forbid! Do not deceive yourself with such thoughts! I am willing to swear never again to speak a word of love to you. Only let me help to save you. That is all I ask."

"You are sure . . . sure?"

"Do you need proofs? Think of him in the light of my words. Do you need proofs?"

She shook her head.

"Very well, then. I'll take legal opinion. May I see you at the same hour tomorrow?"

"Yes."

He bent down and touched her hair with his lips.

"Good-bye, Frida."

She could not answer him.

When he was gone she raised her head as from an evil dream. Mad images danced before her eyes; strange thoughts ran riot in her brain. With fatal clearness arose before her corroborative instance after instance of the truth of Otto's words. Had not the master borrowed her small earnings? Had he not welcomed too eagerly the adoring glances in the eyes of various women? But always again he had found a way to her innermost soul by that power of evoking a strange and poignant romance which he possessed. By virtue of it she could now recall a series of occasions each of which was to her an infinitely sweet and mournful memory, blended forever with some divine fragrance and some strain of immortal music poured by his voice into the blue urn of the mellow night. Of these

memories, at least, time could not rob her, nor mischance nor sorrow. These were hers. Her whole heart craved only one more—one more song from his lips, one more hour in the intoxication of his presence, one more touch of his hand, to become the last and sweetest and most terrible of these memories. . . .

Late in the afternoon she went through the familiar streets; she trod the paths which now she was to tread no more, and her throat ached and burned. And with a full recognition of the necessity of the step she must soon take, a corroding anger rose within her against the man who had forced her to it. She faltered as she saw from afar through the gloom the dim, yellow windows of the master's house. What should she say to him? How should she meet those keen blue eyes with the consciousness of her purpose in her soul? She wanted to forget—once more—to forget and be glad, and she prayed God to grant her that hour of forgetfulness.

III

As she let herself softly into the house she heard voices in the large room beyond—Otto's voice, angry and vibrant; and the master's rising more shrilly than she had ever heard it. She crossed the hall swiftly, drew aside the curtains, and confronted the two men who sat in a small circle of light in a corner of the high, dark room. Both fell silent, and Otto stretched out impulsively a warning hand. For one throbbing minute no one spoke. Then the master arose and came toward her, superbly self-possessed.

"You have been guilty of an indiscretion, child. One does not betray secrets——!"

She was forced to assume a defensive attitude.

"There was no other way!"

"No other way? Many a one whom I have loved has betrayed me. I fixed my firmest, my final faith on you, *Geliebte*. And you, you, too, have failed me."

He folded his hands resignedly.

"How long is this farce to go on?" Otto asked sharply. "I have told you, father, what must be done. Miss Pfeifer is in full possession of the facts."

"What facts?"

"That you do not limit yourself. . . ."

The master turned to Frida.

"And you believe that?"

"I have thought your attitude to Sara Rosen strange; I have thought——"

"And I have proof of its surpassing strangeness," Otto broke in. "I know," he looked at Frida, "I know that I am playing an ungrateful rôle. But the day will come when you will thank me."

The master threw back his head.

"Be silent, boy! Frida, must I defend myself? Do you not remember our days and nights together, our starlight and our song? Sara? She is an apt pupil. She will sing well some day. I have been kind to her. Frida, come . . . to me!"

She felt herself swaying toward him when Otto's sharp tones recalled her.

"He is faithless, cruel, rapacious. He will grind you under his heel, use you, and then throw you away like an old rag. If you have any regard for yourself, leave this house, now!"

"Frida," the master's voice floated, almost singing, to her ear, "if you can believe him, go—out into a sunless, starless world. I thought to keep you at my side, to share with you my glory, my art, my dream. But if you believe him you cannot share these. Then it is better that you should look upon my face no more."

He walked to the open grand piano and struck a few soft chords. Then he leaned his head upon his hands, as if in silent meditation. Otto came to her swiftly.

"For God's sake, do not yield, do not yield! He is old and base. I would

not speak so had he ever been a father to me—for one hour. But I owe him no loyalty; and I owe you the loyalty of a perfect love. Come—come!"

She felt as though her soul were passing from her in the terror of that conflict. She could not bear the thought of passing forever out of the magical atmosphere into which the master had brought her. What would life hold after that but utter barrenness and bleakness? Again Otto spoke.

"Come!"

"Not yet," she whispered, "not yet. . . ."

Then gradually, beautifully, the room filled with a volume of golden sound, luring and irresistible. The master sang with all his art, all his force. Under the strain of his desire to hold the girl's soul the divinest modulations of his youth echoed in his voice:

*"Du gabst sie mir, ich geb sie wieder,
Kennst du die eignen Lieder nicht?"*

Frida trembled. The tears of an unbearable regret rose into her eyes. Every nerve in her slight body answered that appeal. Yes, she could suffer with him and die, but she could not face life without him. The memories would slay her, the memories of the songs that she had given him. Otto caught her hands.

"You ask too much," she said, "more, more than my life."

He dropped her hands and turned away. She went slowly across the room and put her hands on the master's shoulder. But he sang as if unconscious of her touch. Then, suddenly, sounded the resonant slamming of an outer door. The master ceased singing; both turned around, but Otto was gone. At last Frida's husband raised his eyes to her own, and his face seemed to her in that half-light, for the first time, gray, crafty and tragically old.



AN old flame—the Yule log.

GLORY OF YOUTH

By Temple Bailey

FOUR kittens pranced after Helena as she went down to the big gate to get her mail, and when one of them clawed at the ruffles of her gown she picked him up and cuddled him. Over the rose-hedge a small child watched her.

"I like old pussy cats best," he said gravely.

"Oo-h, Toddlekins," Helena reproached him, "you shouldn't like the old pussies. It's the little kitties, the little young kitties that you should like."

But Toddlekins shook his head. "When they are old they are quiet," he remarked sententiously, "and they don't worry you."

With the kitten held close to her breast, Mrs. Marchmont agreed gravely, "Yes, when they are old they are quiet."

"And I like them best that way, don't you?" the child insisted.

Mrs. Marchmont, hesitating, was saved a reply by the sound of hoofs on the road.

"There's the mailman," Toddlekins announced and ran down to meet the wagon.

Helena had four letters. A square white envelope with the address of the writer engraved on the flap she tore open at once. After the opening lines she read the hurried feminine script breathlessly, stopping in the middle of the path, oblivious of the blandishments of the kittens and of Toddlekins's persistent, "See what I've got."

At last he forced her attention and showed his post-cards. On one was a fat waddling goose, with a rhyme to

match; on the other, a staid view of city buildings.

Toddlekins grew enthusiastic over the goose. "Uncle Jack sent it," he said. "He's coming tomorrow. And the other is from your Mr. Marchmont."

It was so like her husband, Helena pondered, to send the dull, uncolored card to a little child. The thought had been kindly, but he had lacked the inspiration of the sender of the waddling goose.

"They are very nice," she told Toddlekins abstractedly, as she re-read the opened letter.

With the post-cards held aloft the small boy slipped through the gate in the rose-hedge to his own yard. Helena called after him:

"I want to borrow you tonight. Mr. Marchmont is coming home. You can have dinner with us. Ask your mother."

"May I?" Toddlekins inquired engagingly of the pretty lady who, in a pink morning-gown, stood on the perch of the little house on his own side of the hedge.

"If your daddy can spare you," she said, smiling at Helena.

"You and daddy have little sister," Helena told her; "you mustn't be selfish."

Little sister, a bundle of pink and white in her wicker carriage, fluttered her hands.

Helena's arms hungered for her. "May I borrow her, too?" she asked wistfully.

"I am afraid you will keep her," her neighbor demurred; "she is so fascinating."

"You can't have her," Toddlekins

ejaculated, "because she is our very own."

Mrs. Marchmont caught her breath. "Yes, she is your very own," she said slowly, and a shadow lay on her face.

The wind, blowing across the beauty of the garden, fluttered the pages of the open letter in her hand, and her thoughts came back to it with something like terror.

"Be sure you let Toddlekins come," she said hastily, as she turned away, "and tell his daddy not to say 'no.'"

Her little neighbor, looking after her, envied the swaying grace of her movements, the exquisiteness of her trailing gown, the distinction of her beauty, and she envied, too, her position as mistress of the great house, with its broad stretches of lawn, its rose-hedges, its terraced garden that swept in the rear to the water's edge.

But no woman need have envied Helena Marchmont as she sat that morning at her desk and read, for the third time, her cousin's letter.

After the "Helena dearest" came the impetuous appeal:

I am writing this because of the girlhood that we lived together. Do you remember the dreams in the old attic at grandmother's, and the love-letters that we found in the little brown trunk? How the women of our family have loved, Helena, and we talked of the days when we should claim our heritage of loving. Then, all at once, you grew practical, and you married Mr. Marchmont. You remember you told me that you felt deeply honored that he should have chosen you—you were radiant over your future as the wife of a distinguished diplomat. I begged you to wait until some young lover should teach you the difference between pride in your husband and love for him—for you were so young, dear heart. But you wouldn't listen.

I know that at first you were happy. But since I have been abroad I find that you have taken up your music again, and now and then I come across your little compositions, and there is a note in them that has set me thinking. What are you wanting, my dear?

You will wonder why I am reviewing all this. It is because I have met here in Paris a man, clever, courtly, all that your husband was and is, and, like your husband, he is nearly sixty. He will give me everything that money can buy—and you know I have been poor all of my life. I admire and respect him, and I am fond of him, in a way.

But is this enough? Has it been enough for you? Does youth never call to youth? Is there anything that your old husband cannot give that you long for with all your soul—your beautiful, dreaming soul, Helena?

Whatever your answer, it shall never be mentioned between us—never again. But I must know, oh, Helena, I must know.

Yours with precious memories,
MARION.

As she read, resentment was Helena's first feeling. Her cousin's acute analysis put into form thoughts that, as yet, she had not dared interpret for herself.

There had been little time to think. The first months of her marriage had been almost perfect. Something of the fires of youth had been relighted in her husband, and as they had sailed the seas in his yacht the outdoor life had given him a buoyancy that had approached juvenility. Then when they had returned to town society had welcomed them back with open arms, and in the excitement of her initial reign as leader Helena had missed nothing.

In the succeeding four years she had found in her music an outlet for an increasing restlessness, but that Marion should have read in her little songs an outcry of her soul was, she felt, unpardonable.

With swift-flying pen she covered four pages of note-paper. Then she read what she had written, and tore it up. The smooth sentences, stating her continued happiness, were an unworthy response to that passionate appeal. For the sake of the old days she must be honest with Marion!

She closed her desk and went to the window. The sunshine of the earlier hours had been succeeded by a drizzling rain. The river was gray like old silver, and without a ripple.

She changed her dress for a short skirt and sweater and, bareheaded, went out into the garden. Through the curtain of rain she emerged upon the pier.

"I want my canoe," she said to the man who was tinkering with the engine of a motor-boat. "I am going out."

"It's rainin', ma'am," he suggested superfluously.

"I know," she said, "but I don't mind it."

The rain came down sharply as she pushed off, but she liked to feel it against her face, and for an hour she drove her little boat through the waters, and came in dripping wet, but glowing. As she sped up the path, Toddlekings, paddling like a duck in the puddles, called to her.

"My Uncle Jack's come," he said, "and your Mr. Marchmont. They got here on the noon train."

"Oh," Helena stopped, dismayed; "I didn't expect Mr. Marchmont until dinner-time."

"We didn't neither," Toddlekings confided, "and mother ain't got anything for lunch."

Helena laughed, and ran into the kitchen.

"Send over a dish of the salad and some hot rolls to Mrs. Campbell," she directed, as she went through; "she has unexpected company."

She could hear her husband's voice in the upper hall, and the maid's answer, "She went out an hour ago, sir."

"Here I am, Lorimer," Helena called; "I didn't expect you so soon."

He came to the head of the broad stairway, a commanding figure in that conspicuous place. His gray hair was a crown for his kingly head, and his manner as he stepped down to greet her was the courtly manner of the old school.

"You are wet, my dear," he said, as he kissed her.

In the inflection Helena read his disapproval, which his further words confirmed.

"You will catch cold some day and die, if you are not more prudent."

Radiant with the morning's exercise, she smiled up at him. "Die? I feel as if I could live forever."

As they faced each other, she in the glory of her strong youth, he with the shadow upon him of decline, the contrast seemed to strike him painfully.

"Perhaps my solicitude is governed by my affection," he told her formally.

"You know what it would mean if I should lose you?"

Something seemed to clutch at her heart. She could not account lately for the terror his adoration inspired. She had the sense of receiving all and giving nothing, and her nature was too generous to make the obligation easy.

"I know," she whispered repentantly, "I—I know how good you are to me, Lorimer."

He kissed her again. "You are the light of my eyes," he said gravely, and went away to dress.

As she got out of her wet things, Helena reflected that it always ended that way. First the irritating admonition, then the rich assurance of his devotion. She sometimes felt that she would rather fight it out in a battle royal. It would clear the air.

After luncheon Marchmont went back to town, and Helena wandered through the rooms restlessly. Finally she telephoned for Toddlekings. "I want him now," she said, "and he must stay for dinner."

His Uncle Jack brought him over.

"He is so clean that we want to keep him that way," was the young man's explanation, as he set the child down carefully on the hearth.

Toddlekings, preening himself like a young pigeon in his fresh white sailor-suit, made the presentation.

"This is Uncle Jack, Mrs. Marchmont," he said. "Uncle Jack, this is the lady that likes to go out in the rain."

"Toddlekings and I are a pair of ducks," Helena said, laughing; "we just wait for a stormy day, and then we get out in it, and his mother and my husband think we are crazy."

"The wild hawk to the wind-swept sky?" quoted the young man, reading her with keen eyes.

The glance that she flashed at him held eager interest. Hitherto he had held for her the negative position of Toddlekings's uncle, but now, at once, he took his place as a tall young man, with gray eyes, a strong chin, a spare figure and a voice with a deep note that rang like a bell.

"That's one of the lines that seem to fit in on stormy days," he explained; "I feel as untamed as a hawk when the wind roars and the rain beats down."

She caught him up radiantly. "Don't you enjoy getting out in it? I stayed on the river this morning, and I was awfully wet——"

"One day," Toddlekings recited vain-gloriously, "Mrs. Marchmont and me runned away, and we didn't come in until dark, and mother was scared and Mr. Marchmont hunted for us."

Helena remembered the freedom of that escapade. They had left the conventional suburban streets and had come to the open country road. To the right of them had been a deep orange sunset; to the left, a dull bank of clouds, and a wet, fragrant wind was blowing from the pine woods. They had gone on and on until darkness had come upon them unawares. They had been brought home in an automobile, for Helena had telephoned her husband from a wayside inn.

"It was a childish thing to do," he had reproved her; and, awake to the enormity of it, she had confessed, "It was awful, Lorimer."

But to her inner consciousness she had admitted, "It was glorious!" Her old husband could not understand; but in this first moment of meeting, she knew that here was a man who would face the winds with her and revel in the buffeting of the storm; in whose veins ran young blood that would sing as hers sang when the air was like wine. Oh, youth, youth, was there anything like it in the whole, wide world!

She came out of her reverie to find that he was asking her about the river.

"Please make use of our boats," she offered; "I am the only one to take them out."

He thanked her and went away, leaving her to talk him over a bit with Toddlekings, and to find that his name was Balfour.

It was the Scotsman in him that appealed to her as she met him oftener after that. He had been born in the Highlands, and the years that he had spent in a newer country had not taken

away the strength of the hills and the point of view of a stern people. Once when he had argued with her husband, and the older man had taken the side of diplomacy, while the younger one had contended for right aside from expediency, she had found herself quoting, mentally, "The glory of the young men is their strength——"

But this was after many weeks. Today she knew him only as a man who, for a moment, had arrested her attention, and when Toddlekings dropped the subject she did not renew it.

The small boy at the dinner-table was a sight to conjure with. He radiated satisfaction, and surveyed the table with a critical eye.

"I've got a lot of forks," he commented, "and what's the round spoon for?"

"Soup," Helena told him; "and the little forks are for oysters, and the broad ones for fish."

"We don't have so many," Toddlekings said, with a sigh, "but then we are poor, and Uncle Jack's poor—he says it runs in our family."

Helena smiled. "There are worse things than being poor, dear little boy," she observed, and turned her attention to Marchmont.

But Toddlekings insisted on being the centre of things, and as the meal progressed, Helena saw in her husband little signs of irritation. Too courteous to scold, he grew more and more silent, until Helena drew him out by a leading question.

He brightened up after that, and entertained her immensely with his account of an afternoon's experience on the suburban train. For years he had been a famous diner-out, and his wit was not less keen nor his conversation less brilliant when his wife constituted his audience.

As dessert came on, Toddlekings, full to repletion, shone upon them once more. "I wish I was your little boy," he said, smiling beatifically.

"I wish you were," Helena answered, with quick-drawn breath.

"Do you have ice-cream every day?" Toddlekings inquired.

"We have it very often."

"Well, I wish you'd 'dopt me," Toddlekens informed her, "right away."

"But what would mother do, and little sister, and daddy?"

Toddlekens considered. "Well, then, you ought to 'dopt some other little boy."

"If I might!" Helena murmured.

It was the opening of an old argument.

"You would simply tie yourself down," her husband flashed out, and Helena steered immediately away from the shoals of controversy.

As they adjourned to the music-room for their coffee, Toddlekens nodded sleepily in Helena's arms.

"He is too heavy for you, my dear; put him down or let me take him," her husband advised, but she would not, and she dropped into a chair on one side of the fireplace, with the little lad held close.

Her husband stood on the rug looking down at them with eyes that made her say hastily:

"Sing for me, Lorimer."

He had the remnants of a once fine voice, and as he sat at the piano he made an impressive figure, with his great gray head thrown back and his long fingers falling on the keys.

He sang a few bars and stopped. "I am not in the mood," he said, and came back and sat on the other side of the fireplace.

Conversation after that was desultory. The evening was cool, and a little fire snapped in the grate. Toddlekens was asleep, and after a time Marchmont's head sank to one side, his breathing grew deep and regular, and he, too, slept.

Seen thus, the mantle of dignity seemed to fall from him and leave him simply old. It came to her at that moment what she had lost. All about her were gay encircled hearthstones, while hers was presided over by this silent effigy.

She stood up with the child in her arms. She felt shut in, stifled, faint.

Her long white wrap gave her something of the semblance of a ghost as she

slipped from the house and swept across the lawn, and through the gate in the rose-hedge to the neighboring house.

Toddlekens opened his eyes as he was ushered into the rose-red light of his own home.

"Where's Uncle Jack?" was his immediate demand.

"He has gone out," his mother said. Then she took him from Helena.

"The queen is dead, long live the king," she laughed. "You must look out, Mrs. Marchmont."

"You mustn't love Uncle Jack best," Mrs. Marchmont told Toddlekens, "or I shall feel dreadfully."

Toddlekens leaned forward and kissed her sleepily.

"Next to mother and daddy and little sister, I love you best," he stated.

His father, emerging from the other side of the rose-red lamp, had little sister in his arms.

"S-sh," he said, as he greeted Helena; "she has just dropped off."

"You beauty!" Helena whispered, bending over her.

She left presently, knowing that Toddlekens must be put to bed, and as she went out into the dark she had a vision of the young husband, with one arm about his wife, with the baby cradled in the other, with the little lad completing the family group, and around about them all the rose-red light. And across the hedge, in her great, quiet house, was an old man asleep.

As she crossed the lawn, she found herself saying aloud: "I can't go in. I can't go in," and she turned down the path that led to the river.

As she unfastened her boat from the pier, her hands trembled. But she was not afraid. No one ever came to this part of the river at night, and the curved shore with the screening willows made a place of retreat where no prying eyes could see her.

A little silver moon and a few stars shone in the quiet sky. The river whispered through the rushes. There was not a soul in sight.

Wraith-like in her white gown, she sent her boat swiftly upstream. Be-

yond the limits of her husband's possessions she dared not go, but his grounds extended for some distance along the water's edge, ending in a horn-like promontory that enclosed a little bay.

It was in this little bay that Helena rested, sliding under the drooping willows. Then, sitting huddled up in the bottom of the boat, she sobbed wildly.

She was not sure why she cried, but the night and the moon and the fragrance that drifted down from the rose-garden seemed to speak to her of something she had missed.

Then out of the night came a question, "Aren't you afraid?"

"No," she answered at once, "and you didn't startle me, for I knew your voice."

The young man laughed. "I took you at your word, and borrowed one of your boats, and when I came upon you I thought I had met a water spirit."

As his canoe came nearer, the glimmering light of the little moon showed the tears upon her cheeks.

"Oh," he apologized quickly, "I beg your pardon. I did not know you were in trouble."

"I am not," she said simply, as their boats drifted side by side; "that is, nothing that ought to be called a trouble. I was crying for the moon."

But she did not smile, and her pale face under the braided coronal of brown hair was wistful.

"The moon," he told her whimsically, "is made of green cheese. I used to cry for it. But I have grown wise."

There was a quality in his voice that rested her. Instinctively she knew that here was a man for whom life held deep meanings.

"I used to want many things," he went on, "but I have had to take it out in wanting. It doesn't pay to cry over life. We have just got to make the best of it."

It was a stern philosophy that he preached, but coming at the moment of her rebellion against her petted, inactive existence, it was like a breath of fresh air.

"But it's hard," she began.

"Yes," he agreed, as he reached over and drew her boat closer, guiding it with his own, "it is hard. I've had to fight ever since I was a boy. And I am glad of it. It has brought out something in me that wouldn't have been developed if I had had an easy time. It has given me a little, I hope, of the spirit that animated my father and my grandfathers, and they were all born among the hills of Scotland, with the elect. Sometimes I wish that my whole life might be a fight, so that I might come to be more like them before I die."

In him spoke the high idealism of youth, and to it the idealism of Helena responded.

"How wonderful that sounds—to be happy—fighting——"

He smiled at her. "If the battle is for the right, one feels the glory——"

"Yes."

Face to face, youth responding to youth, it did not seem strange to them that they should thus reveal themselves.

"Oh," Helena said, as the boats came silently to her pier, "you have done me so much good—now I shall not cry—for the moon——"

"I wish you need not cry for anything," he said gravely, as he helped her out.

She gave him her hand. "Good night," she said; "they will wonder where I am."

"Good night." And he watched her until the door of the big house opened and shut behind her.

As Helena passed the music-room, her husband was still asleep, and from that vision she fled almost in a panic. Up in her room she stood still in the dark, all a-quiver with new impulses, new desires, set aflame by the vivid life that had touched her own.

After a time she lighted a lamp, and changed her dress for a kimono of smoke-gray, with hints of yellow in the sleeves and sash. In it, with her shining brown hair, she was like a sober butterfly touched with sunshine.

Her cousin's letter lay on her desk. Without hesitation she wrote the open-

ing address, then stopped with pen suspended as she heard her husband calling. She rose and went into the hall.

"I am here," she said.

Marchmont stood at the foot of the stairs.

"I wondered where you had gone," he said.

"I am tired," she evaded. "I was going to write letters—but I am too—tired—for that."

"You are not coming down again?"

"No. Good night."

He smiled up at her irresolutely; then he said, "Good night, Helena," and went back alone into the quiet room.

In the weeks that followed no word went to Marion. Helena, entering upon a round of Summer gaiety, refused to let herself think of the letter or of the problem that must be solved in answering it.

She saw Balfour every day. Sometimes it was only for a moment as she came down to her carriage in all the glory of filmy floating ruffles and rose-crowned hat, on her way to a garden-party or similar function. Their greeting might be a mere wave of the hand, but always she would carry away with her a picture of him as he stood in the sunshine in the glory of his youth, and gradually she found that he came into her dreams as well as her waking thoughts—strong, vivid, the embodiment of the life from which she was shut out.

Her liking for him, however, held as yet nothing of self-consciousness.

"He is such a nice boy, Lorimer," she told her husband frankly. "I have asked him to dinner, so that you can know him."

Her husband smiled at her. "You have so many enthusiasms," he commented; "but bring on your Scotchman."

• The dinner was a success. There were a dozen guests, and Marchmont, brilliantly filling the part of host, dominated the table.

"How fine he is!" was Balfour's en-

comium, as Marchmont finished a story of delicate wit.

"Isn't he?" Helena glowed at his praise of her husband. It was in such a mood as this that she had married Lorimer; it was in such moods that she did not regret her marriage.

In her momentary recovery of content she showed a sparkling gaiety that added new glamour to her beauty. She wore her shining hair puffed out over her ears in the revival of an old fashion, with a pearl comb. Her gown, a concession to Summer informality, was a princess robe of delicately embroidered white. She was girlish, gracious, altogether lovely.

All that evening Balfour's eyes were upon her. He studied Marchmont, too, weighing her freshness and beauty against her husband's attainments.

"How did it happen," he asked, on his way home that night, "that she married Marchmont?"

His sister, leaning happily on the arm of her young husband, ventured, "Perhaps it was his intellect—I don't believe mere money would have been the attraction."

"It's a mistake, such a marriage."

"He worships her. His first wife died years ago, and he had never looked at another woman until he met Helena."

"It's all wrong," Balfour's lips were set in a stern line; "he will be a doddering idiot when she is eager for life—"

"Well, she is perfectly happy now," Mrs. Campbell stated complacently.

"Is she?" Balfour questioned, remembering the night in the boat.

Lorimer was as enthusiastic as his wife over the young Scotchman. "We had a good talk," he said, "and I find he is decidedly worth while."

Later he spoke of his ability to give Balfour a push along the road to success.

"I wonder if he wants an office?" he asked. "I need someone to help me right now, and I'd be glad to take him."

"You might ask him," his wife suggested doubtfully.

But she hated to think of that brave young spirit clipped to meet the de-

mands of political intrigue, and all that night and the next day the possibility lay heavily upon her.

It was a gloomy day with rain in the low gray clouds, but not a drop fell and the house was stifling. In the afternoon Helena crossed the lawn and hailed Toddlekings.

"Tell your mother that I want to run away with you."

Mrs. Campbell, sewing in the porch, with little sister at her feet, smiled at her neighbor.

"You can run as far as you like," she said, "but running is strenuous exercise for such a day. John went out a half-hour ago, and said he was going to climb Cloister Hill. I told him to stay here and keep cool, but he wouldn't."

"Toddlekings and I won't run far," Helena promised, but even as she spoke she knew that she should climb Cloister Hill.

The hill was crowned by the monastery from which it took its name. Here in a new world a little band of Franciscans had set their house to face the east. On each side of the broad white road that led to it were groves, cool, quiet, tending to meditation, and it was along the edge of one of these that Helena wandered with Toddlekings.

They came upon John Balfour in the shelter of a great gray rock. He was reading a thin leather-bound volume, and, as he looked up and saw them, the dreams were still in his eyes.

"I knew I should find you," Helena told him frankly. "Your sister said you were here. Toddlekings and I are running away, and we thought you might like to join us."

"Where are you going?" he asked her, smiling.

"Over the hills and far away," she confided, to Toddlekings's infinite delight.

He opened his book where his finger marked the place.

"I was reading that," he said, "when you came. It goes beyond the nursery version."

"And o'er the hills and far away,
Beyond their utmost purple rim,
Beyond the night, across the day,
Through all the world she followed him,"

she read, and a sudden silence fell between them. Presently as they walked on, she stated her husband's proposition.

"What do you think of it?" she asked him.

He hesitated. "He is very kind."

"But you don't want it?"

He shook his head. "I think not. Forestry is my profession, you know. I am not really tamed—and I love the woods. I finished my course at the University two years ago, and I have just received my first big offer. A man down South wants me to take care of his trees. I shall have a house that overlooks three States, and the hunting is fine. I go Saturday."

The words of the poem she had just read echoed in her mind dully—"Through all the world she followed him." Up there in the great forest on the top of the mountain there would be freedom!

But she spoke quietly enough. "Then you go—Saturday?"

"Yes."

For a moment she was silent, watching a black cloud that was rolling up in the southwest.

"It is going to rain," she said irrelevantly.

"Yes. We must get under shelter. We can reach the chapel of the monastery in time, I think."

He picked up Toddlekings and they began the steep ascent.

It came to Helena as they ran along together, the man with the child on one arm, and helping her strongly with the other when they came to the rough places, that this was what life might have held for her if she had waited.

"Look," Balfour said suddenly. "Isn't that wonderful?"

Behind the monastery the clouds were as black as night. Against them the gray old building showed spectrally, and the gold cross at the top was luminous.

"It's like a white spirit turning its back upon that devil of a storm," Balfour said. Then his voice rose exultantly: "Here comes the wind!"

With a roar and a force that almost

took Helena off her feet, the storm swept upon them. For a few minutes they were in a chaotic world that grew dark and darker, about them the leaves whirled in a mad dance, and branches crashed and fell.

But Helena was not afraid. "Isn't it glorious?" she panted, and Balfour, shielding her with his arm, shouted above the noise, "Hear that!" and faintly, solemnly, through all the pandemonium, came the sound of men's voices singing in the chapel.

Roar of wind, sweetness of celestial voices, warring of flesh and spirit!

To Helena, emotionally tense, the real world had disappeared. She was a disembodied spirit, floating through infinite space with another spirit as joyous, as exalted, as triumphant as her own.

She came to herself as they gained the shelter of the chapel. They had been laughing madly as they came through the wild world outside, but now they hushed suddenly. Darkened by the storm, lighted only by candles on an altar in an alcove, the domed building seemed empty. But the murmur of singing voices from a hidden stairway told that the monks had passed from the galleries and were making their way to the refectory.

A lay brother slipped in to perform the last offices of the altar. Seeing them, he came to offer them hospitality.

"You may come to the kitchen and let the child sit by the fire," he told Balfour shyly. "I am sorry, but your wife would not be allowed anywhere but in the chapel."

"Will you take the child with you?" Balfour asked him. "I should not like to leave—her—alone."

The brother went away, with Toddlekens, alertly curious, and Helena was left alone with Balfour.

The spell of the storm was still upon them. It was a moment when a word might change the current of their lives, might carry them into a whirlpool of confession that would engulf them.

But that word was not to be said. Idealists, both of them, dreamers of

dreams, they had dwelt hitherto above the valleys of intrigue, and even in this moment of abandon they were not to leave the heights.

Balfour, breathing hard, was the first to speak. "That is as it should have been," he said; "my wife——"

With shaking voice Helena protested. "We must not—we must not——"

There was a long silence, and then he said dully, "No, we must not——"

"You remember you said—that night—that one might be happy—fighting?"

"Yes."

"Then that must be our happiness."

"Yes."

As he said it, he stood up, and dimly she perceived that he was praying. So had men prayed, standing, in the old kirk in Scotland, and in this house of different worship he would make no concession.

The act gave her a new light on his character. Perhaps it was his simple faith that made him different, that set him apart, that made his youth more glorious than that of the cynical stripplings of her own world.

When he sat down she said, "I shall always be glad that you came into my life—although you are going out of it——"

His voice had regained the firm quality that made her feel secure. "You cannot be as glad as I," he said. "I have never met such a woman as you. I shall never meet such a woman again."

Out there in the wind they had been a pair of pagans, exulting in a new emotion. Here in this half-dark house of God they were awakened man and woman, holding on, as best they could, to the best that was within them.

The brother, coming in after a time, found them examining the strange bas-reliefs on the old altar in a niche, and discussing it with steady voices.

"There is refreshment in the portico. The storm is over," he told them, and when they had followed him they found Toddlekens warmed and dried, and all together they had coffee and cakes.

"There's your Mr. Marchmont,"

said Toddlekings, as he came running back through the corridor.

Looking out the arched doorway they could see a big touring-car coming slowly up the hill. Puffing through the mud, it waked echoes in that quiet place.

"I am always hunting my wife in storms, Balfour," Marchmont remarked, as they met him at the door. "I believe her love of them is an obsession, like drink in men."

As Marchmont spoke of her, Helena saw the eyes of the brown-cassocked brother go from one man to the other. Then he turned to her. "You must pardon my mistake," he said.

"It was natural," Helena assured him. "The child is my neighbor. Mr. Balfour is his uncle."

"Yes," he said, "yes." But his eyes still read the little group eagerly.

She wondered what he would make of it, and then forgot him as her husband helped her into her rain-coat.

"I asked every man, woman and child that I met if they had seen you—it was great detective work, Helena."

In spite of the forced lightness of his words Helena saw that he was disturbed, and the ride home was a silent one.

At the foot of their lawn John Balfour climbed down with Toddlekings; then he said, "Good-bye."

"I am going Saturday," he explained, "and tonight I must run up to town. I shall not see you again."

Their parting was very simple—just a clasp of the hand. But when she reached her own porch Helena, looking back, saw that he still stood where they had left him, straight and strong in the gray twilight.

Marchmont, following the direction of her eyes, spoke with irritation. "I can't understand your mutual love of storms," he said, "yours and Balfour's. It was a pretty silly performance this afternoon, Helena."

In her overwrought condition he had struck the wrong note.

"No, you can't," she said tensely, "you can't understand—now. But

years ago, when you were young—you might——"

He faced her in silence for a moment; then he said stiffly, "I am sorry that I am no longer young," and turned and went into the house.

Helena did not go down to dinner. The excitement had brought on a headache which furnished an excuse. She had a fire built in her bedroom grate, and wrapped in her gray kimono she lay and looked at the leaping flames with somber eyes.

At the moment John Balfour stood in her thoughts as symbolic of the youth she had forfeited. She did not analyze the degree of her liking for him. It was enough that he typified all that she had lost. For that she should mourn him. For that she should go softly for the rest of her days. And as that vision stretched before her, she lay very still.

Downstairs in the music-room, her husband touched the keys of the piano, and after a time he sang. The song was one to which she had often listened carelessly, but tonight the words seemed to hold a solemn significance:

"Sing me a song of a lad that is gone,
Say, could that lad be I?
Merry of soul he sailed on a day,
Over the sea to Skye.

"Mull was astern, Rum on the port,
Egg on the starboard bow,
Glory of youth glowed in his soul,
Where is that glory now?"

The worn voice quavered and broke. She sat up and listened breathlessly. Then, as the song was resumed, she crept to the head of the stairs.

"Give me again, all that was there,
Give me the sun that shone!
Give me the eyes, give me the soul,
Give me the lad that's gone.

"Billow and breeze, island and seas,
Mountains of rain and sun,
All that was good, all that was fair,
All that was me is gone."

The last words rolled out in passionate plaintiveness, and once more the house was very still.

Helena, at the head of the stairway, found herself drawn strangely to the singer. Dimly she felt that he was

crying out for his lost youth, because the possession would have brought him nearer to her.

With sudden illumination she saw what his life might have been had his other wife lived. Together they would have grown old; together they would have spoken of a precious past; together they would have faced quietly their little future.

But all this was denied him. Like herself he was the victim of an abnormal condition. Her youth reproached him for his age. His age was a drag and weight upon her youth. Each of them bore a burden of the other's making.

Like a gray shadow she flitted downstairs and into the music-room. It was lighted only by the candles over the piano and by the fire. Her husband sat with his hands dropped over the keys, gazing into space. There was about him nothing outwardly pathetic, but her intuition gave him the sympathy he craved.

"Lorimer," she said, and laid her hands on his shoulders.

He turned. "You will take cold," he said quickly.

"No, no," she said, and her hand just touched his cheek. "I wanted to be—with you——"

She saw his face light up at the unusual caress, at the unusual words. He

caught her hands in his, held them tightly for a moment, and then he spoke almost passionately.

"Oh, Helena, Helena," he said, "you should have married a younger man."

But now that he had voiced it her instinct was to combat the truth, to fight off the confession that would bring misery to both of them.

"Silly," she said, smiling; "I married you, Lorimer——"

She stood back a little from him. Her gray robe with its sunlight flashes of yellow swept the floor and gave her a fictitious tallness; her head was held high as if she defied fate. She was very pale, but her eyes were like stars.

"Life holds a great deal as it is," she said; "you have been very good to me—dear."

Never before had she called him that. With a half-sob he put his arms about her and gathered her to him, and, panting a little in that loving prison, she still smiled up at him.

Later, when she had left him happy, she went back to her room and opened her desk. Her cousin's letter lay on the blotter. With steady fingers she took a fresh sheet of paper and answered it.

And the answer, in three heavily underlined words, was written firmly, clearly:

"Don't, don't, don't."



AH, YES!

THE PESSIMIST—A dollar won't go as far as it did ten years ago.
THE OPTIMIST—No, but it gets there a great deal quicker.



BOGGS—Yes, he married her for her beauty.
FOGGS—I wonder if he feels like a widower now, or merely divorced.

L'AVEUGLE

Par Jean Reibrach

A INSI, docteur, questionna la visiteuse, vous espérez? ...
— Je fais plus, madame, je suis sûr!

Alors l'aveugle:

— Tu entends, Suzanne? Sûr! Il est sûr!

Et son émotion, vainement contenue, éclata:

— Ah! voir! Retrouver cet univers dont je suis retranché depuis deux ans!... Mais, surtout, te voir, ma Suzanne, toi qui fus, qui es tout pour moi et que je ne connais pas!... Te voir enfin, toi et ta beauté, tes cheveux d'or, tes yeux bleus comme les ciels bleus!...

Le docteur reporta les yeux sur la jeune femme. Elle était brune, sans autre beauté qu'une expression de douleur mélancolique et d'infinie tendresse. Mais elle faisait de son doigt vers ses lèvres le geste du silence, et, s'étant incliné, le docteur se retira.

L'aveugle, André de Gèvres, avait été blessé par l'explosion d'une mine, dans une carrière. La maison de campagne où se trouvait alors Suzanne était proche. Les ouvriers l'y avaient porté. Suzanne était libre, veuve. Une pitié violente l'avait bouleversée en présence du jeune ingénieur désormais aveugle; et comme il était sans famille, elle s'était opposée à son transport à l'hôpital. Seul, le dévouement dont elle se sentait capable pouvait l'arracher à son désespoir. Elle s'y était employée toute. Avec lui, elle avait souffert, rendant sa douleur moins affreuse d'être partagée. Elle l'avait entouré de l'affection d'une sœur, avait éclairé la nuit où il s'était plongé de l'aube radieuse de sa tendresse. Celle qui le veillait, alors, qui le conso-

lait, il l'avait associée en lui-même à toutes les choses dont il avait l'impaisable regret. Elle avait participé de leur beauté. Ne percevant d'elle que les sonorités délicates de la voix, il s'était plu à s'en créer une image lumineuse et blonde; et elle, ingénument, parce qu'il souriait à ce rêve, lui consentait, comme on fait aux enfants, la vision d'un ange blond penché sur son chevet. Trop tard, Suzanne avait découvert le cheminement de l'illusion, l'émoi du jeune et frais mystère dont sa présence environnait l'infirme, la détresse naissante de ce cœur où des besoins d'amour se réveillaient, désespérés. Comment lui retirer les mains qu'il aimait à presser dans les siennes? Comment les dérober à la reconnaissance de ses lèvres?... Elle-même, d'ailleurs, ne savait plus les bornes de son immense tendresse. Et c'était elle, peu à peu, maternelle amante, qui lui avait donné tout son cœur, donné ses lèvres, donné l'amour...

Or, maintenant, du grand bonheur de la guérison, se levait cette angoisse que le mensonge allait éclater, la merveilleuse vision s'abîmer en la banale et triste image que renvoyaient les miroirs!

Affronter le regard d'André, ce regard qui s'effarerait d'horreur, crierait le reproche de l'amour volé dans l'ombre! Ou, pis même, voir André, par gratitude, se hausser jusqu'à l'aumône d'une pitié, d'une tendresse feinte! Cela, non. C'était au-dessus de ses forces!

L'illusion du bonheur—qui était du bonheur pourtant—avait rendu à André le désir, la volonté de vivre. Par là, elle l'avait conduit jusqu'au seuil inespéré de la lumière. La tâche était rem-

plie. Elle devait disparaître. Lui, l'univers reconquis le consolerait.

Suzanne, sa visite terminée, rejoignit le docteur dans son cabinet.

— Vous avez entendu, dit-elle. Vous savez quelle est l'illusion du malade ! Cette illusion, je vous demande de la lui laisser.

D'un signe grave et discret, le docteur acquiesça. D'elle-même, la jeune femme alla au-devant d'une objection :

— L'opération réussira d'autant plus sûrement que le calme de son esprit sera plus entier. Puis, si, par impossible, elle venait à échouer, la désillusion serait irréparable. Seule, la joie de la guérison pourra l'adoucir !

Et, souriant, d'un sourire triste et charmant :

— Donc, s'il vous parle de moi, je suis blonde, mes yeux sont bleus et... je suis belle...

La résolution de Suzanne était si irrévocable qu'elle lui laissait une sérénité. La complicité discrète du docteur l'aida. Sur cette pente du sacrifice, elle continuait de subir l'impulsion à la fois féminine et maternelle qui avait agi sur elle dès le début. Le sentiment maternel persista presque seul, au temps de l'opération. Celle-ci fut heureuse, et bientôt la guérison s'affirma.

— Encore une semaine ! annonça le docteur.

La nuit complète avait cessé autour du malade, et le bandeau déjà tamisé jusqu'à ses prunelles la caresse confuse de la lumière. L'approche de l'événement le rendait lui-même grave, recueilli. Ce jour-là, il dit :

— Suzanne, sais-tu ? Je tremble un peu, au moment de te voir enfin. Je tremble d'une émotion presque religieuse.

Lui ayant pris les mains, il l'attira :

— Donne-moi ton cher visage, là, contre le mien ! Ce sont des enfantillages que je vais te dire. Mais un malade est comme un enfant, un peu. Pourquoi t'ai-je, de moi-même, pensée blonde ? La douceur de ta voix, sans doute, et la tendre pitié dont tu m'environnais éveillaient en moi l'impression de cette nuance. Mais qui sait si, bien plus encore, ma pensée éperdue ne se retenait

pas désespérément à cette couleur comme à la lumière elle-même. L'or fluide de tes cheveux, c'était comme du soleil qui, échappé à mes yeux, coulait du moins parmi mes doigts, les traversait comme un clair midi de tous ses rayons tièdes, et le bleu de tes yeux, c'était un peu de ciel encore qui, du fond de ma nuit, demeurait le mien !

Il s'interrompit :

— Tu pleures ?

— C'est de joie ! mentit Suzanne.

Il reprit :

— Cette impression s'est effacée, noyée dans mon amour même. C'est parce que je te voyais blonde que j'ai aimé la beauté blonde. Tu le comprends, n'est-ce pas ? Tu comprends que si tu avais été brune, j'aurais aimé la beauté des brunes, que la beauté que j'aime, c'est ta beauté à toi ?

L'angoisse d'une trahison poigna Suzanne. Elle voulut dégager ses mains. Mais André les retenait. Elle se laissa couler sur les genoux, cachant son front contre lui comme s'il avait pu la voir. Elle se raidissait, prête à une suprême dénégation, résolue à fuir ensuite, pour ne plus revenir, dès qu'elle aurait la force de se lever.

André, cependant, reprenait :

— Il faut pourtant que je te dise ? Si nous nous étions trompés, Suzanne, l'un l'autre ? Si tu avais eu cette délicate pensée de t'affirmer blonde uniquement pour complaire à mon idée ingénue, à mon rêve de lumière ?... et si moi, de mon côté ?...

Un gémissement de Suzanne l'arrêta une seconde.

— Il sait ! Il sait ! songeait-elle épouvantée.

Et, en effet, André reprit, d'une voix que mouillait une tendresse plus profonde :

— Les sens des aveugles ont des subtilités merveilleuses. Le joli mensonge de tes lèvres, Suzanne, le parfum de tes cheveux, leur douce senteur d'amande amère, le trahissait à ton insu...

La dénégation de Suzanne s'arrêta dans sa gorge. Oh ! sans doute, blonde, brune, qu'eût importé si elle avait été belle ? Mais qu'André, au lieu de la radieuse vision rêvée, ne retrouvât d'elle

que le charme de sa voix, la grâce mélancolique de son sourire!... Oh! pourquoi n'était-elle pas partie déjà? Pourquoi avait-elle attendu si longtemps?

— Les doigts des aveugles aussi, continuait André, sont d'admirables instruments. Mes doigts, eux, te voyaient. Tu ne soupçonnais point leur caresse sournoise, ni les perceptions plus délicates encore de mes lèvres. Ah! ton visage, non point les traits puérils des vierges de missel, mais les traits animés et mobiles, je les connais au point que j'en pourrais, de mémoire, retracer les contours!

Suzanne, par intervalles, continuait de gémir. Elle se sentait vue, en effet, et quelque chose de doux et de mystérieux lui semblait l'envelopper toute. Son nom, tombant à nouveau des lèvres d'André comme une prière, la fit involontairement lever la tête. Et tout à coup elle jeta un grand cri. Le bandeau était retiré du front d'André. Il la regardait, et voici que ses yeux vivaient, qu'un être inattendu, lui, avait surgi tout à coup des ténèbres et du mystère!...

— Oui, confessait, André, tandis qu'elle cachait de nouveau son visage éperdu, oui, nous t'avons menti. Je suis guéri, je vois! Et je t'ai vue, enfin, ma Suzanne. Et c'est bien toi, telle que je te savais! Si belle dans ta pâleur et dans ton angoisse, plus belle encore, bientôt, de ton amour, de ton bonheur! O ma Suzanne, rends-moi ton cher visage, rends-moi ton regard, que je découvre enfin, toute, celle qui est toi!

Suzanne s'abandonnait, comme balottée dans la stupeur d'un songe. Le geste d'André, doucement, soulevait son visage. Il apparut, les paupières baissées, éploré, d'une pâleur de cru-

cifiée. Lui, d'une voix d'extase, murmurait:

— Comme tu es belle! Et comme je t'aime!

Il la relevait dans ses bras. Elle osa, une seconde, le regarder. Par deux fois, ses prunelles craintives, ramenées malgré elle, se détournèrent éblouies, et, brisée, elle laissa aller sa tête sur l'épaule d'André. Elle n'osait croire encore. C'était impossible, c'eût été trop de bonheur!

— Tu es belle, ma Suzanne, et je t'aime!

Un court sanglot s'étouffa dans la gorge de Suzanne. Puis, elle ne bougea plus, envahie d'une ivresse lente.

— Je t'aime! répétait André.

Un sourire, comme d'une lassitude de bonheur, commença d'éclorre aux lèvres de Suzanne, entr'ouvertes sur les dents claires. Enfin, sa tête se détacha. Elle osa de nouveau le regarder. Leurs prunelles se prirent, se pénétrèrent. Ils se reconnaissaient. Ils étaient pareils à deux êtres venus l'un vers l'autre du fond des temps.

Ils dirent, d'un souffle pareil:

— Toi! toi!

Puis ils se turent. Suzanne, à présent, croyait. Sa beauté, elle la lisait au miroir des yeux vivants, elle la sentait naître de toute son ardente volonté d'être belle, mûrir comme un fruit, de tout son amour, et, montée de son cœur s'épanouir en gloire dans l'ardent pâlour de sa face, dans la flamme de son regard, dans la rose rouge de sa bouche heureuse.

Mais déjà, les lèvres d'André la cherchaient. Elle palpita comme sous un premier baiser. Et une pudeur, en même temps, se renouvela, parce que lui, maintenant, les voyait.



AN INSTANCE

MRS. CRAWFORD—It's always best to aim high.

MRS. CRABSHAW—I'm not so sure about that. I asked my husband for an auto for Christmas, and we compromised on a new go-cart for Willie.

PLAYS PLEASANT AND UNPLEASANT

By Channing Pollock

THE play of the month was "The Witching Hour." Likewise the play of the current season.

New York may have had a better drama in the course of the past five years, but, if so, the name of this supreme work doesn't pop into my mind on the moment. Let's give Augustus Thomas the benefit of the doubt, and call "The Witching Hour" the play of the past half-decade.

One thing is certain—Mr. Thomas himself has done nothing to compare with the piece being presented by John Mason and his perfect company at the Hackett. I write this with a complete list of Thomasic productions, from "The Burglar" to "The Ranger," lying before me, and with a clear mental picture of three or four of these offerings that I have praised exceedingly. The Thomas plays have always suggested the young person who had "a little curl right in the middle of her forehead."

Ten or twelve years ago, when the ambition to be a dramatist first took form in my brain, I was assigned to review "The Hoosier Doctor" for the Washington Post. Willard Holcomb, who was my chief in those days, observed me upon my return to the office, and noted the woebegone expression of my normally placid countenance. "You look as though you'd lost your last friend!" he said. "What's the matter?" "The Hoosier Doctor," I answered. "Bad as that?" quoth he. "Good as that," I returned. "I'm down in the mouth because I realize that never, never, if I live to be a hundred years old, will I

write a play as fine as 'The Hoosier Doctor.'"

No other effort of the gentleman from Missouri affected me that way until I went to "The Witching Hour." A lobbyist who mistook me for Mr. Thomas because we both are rotund, accosted me in the foyer of the Hackett Theatre and inquired: "Did you write this play?" "No," I replied, "but I wish to God I had!"

"The Witching Hour" is worth seeing even more than "The Thief," previous high-water mark of the season, and for several reasons. In the first place, it is better acted. Considered simply on its own merits, it has the advantage of being crisp and terse instead of verbose, and of a far greater number of stirring situations than were evolved by M. Bernstein. In no one spot is its butter spread as thickly as in the second act of "The Thief," but the whole surface of the bread is covered amply and evenly. There is not a single dull moment in the piece; its first act alone contains three conversations that, distributed throughout the manuscript, would keep any play ever written from being a failure. Most important of all, Mr. Thomas has displayed originality and daring in the choice of a theme that cannot be credited to M. Bernstein. Theft is a subject old as the hills—or, at least, old as the theatre—while telepathy has never before been used as the mainspring of a drama. That virtue would make the offering an achievement if it had no other—but it has many others. "The Witching Hour" is big, vigorous, moving and continuously entertaining.

Jack Brookfield is the proprietor of a

gambling-house in Louisville, where he provides "expensive recreation for rich men in search of rest" and where, incidentally, he cares for his sister and her daughter, Viola Campbell. This young girl is beloved by Clay Whipple, whose mother, Helen Whipple, gave up Brookfield years ago because he would not give up cards. One of the three conversations mentioned is between these two middle-aged folk—the woman now a widow, the man still a bachelor, both sweetened by an affection that has mellowed with age but never died. The second conversation is that in which Judge Prentice, who comes to Brookfield's to look at a picture, explains to the gambler some of the theories of thought transference. In the third dialogue, Frank Hardmuth, assistant district attorney, announces his intention of winning Viola, and the girl's uncle objects because of the knowledge that Hardmuth was concerned in the assassination of the Governor of Kentucky. Shortly afterward, Clay Whipple comes into the room with Tom Denning, who is a trifle drunk and who insists upon holding before the boy's face a scarf-pin set with a jewel—the cat's-eye—of which the lad has a hereditary horror. Goaded to madness by the sight of this pin, Clay strikes out blindly with a heavy ivory paper-cutter and kills his tormentor.

The second act takes place in the home of Judge Prentice, to whose court the question of a new trial for Whipple has been referred on account of a legal technicality. Jack Brookfield calls and asks permission to introduce two ladies who are to arrive shortly. While the men are waiting, they resume the topic of telepathy, which the gambler has followed up with amazing results. Mrs. Whipple, who enters presently with Viola, proves to be the daughter of a woman the Judge's love of whom has been one of the finest and most delicate touches in the play. Without disclosing her relationship to Clay, she recalls to the magistrate her mother's dread of the cat's-eye. Once that recollection is established, she tells the story of her son's crime, and, with in-

finite tact and diplomacy, induces the Judge to decide in favor of the new trial.

When the curtain rises on the third act, Jack Brookfield is pacing his room, awaiting a verdict for or against young Whipple. Asked why he remains at home instead of in court, he confesses the belief that, by concentrating his thought and projecting it, he can influence the jury with which rests the boy's fate. He has gone still farther along this line, securing the publication in an evening newspaper of the facts concerning the crime of Hardmuth, who, as acting district attorney, has been malevolently persecuting his rival in the affections of Viola Campbell. Brookfield expects his charges to shake the jury's confidence in Hardmuth. "You're crazy," declares his patron, Lew Ellinger. "The jury can't see the papers!" "No," replies Brookfield, "but thirty thousand other people have seen that story, and five hundred thousand are at fever heat over it. Don't you suppose the thoughts of five hundred thousand men are going to affect twelve?"

Whatever it is that affects the twelve, Clay Whipple is discharged, and comes home to his mother and his sweetheart. Then comes Hardmuth. He is white with rage, and he presses a loaded revolver against the heart of his former friend. "I'm going to kill you!" he screams.

Brookfield looks him straight in the eye.

"You can't kill me," he says, slowly. "You—can't—fire—that—pistol. You—can't—even—hold—it."

The revolver drops to the floor.

"I wonder how in hell you did that to me!" gasps the would-be murderer.

Can you imagine how sophisticated New York would take that situation if it weren't convincingly led up to by Mr. Thomas and beautifully acted by John Mason and George Nash? Even as it is, a few newspapers and a great many individuals have ridiculed the incident. "A man came into my office with a bill," someone remarked to me. "I had just seen 'The Witching Hour,' so I looked

him in the eye and said: 'You can't collect that bill. You—can't—even—hold—it.'

"'You're a liar!' the man answered. 'I'm going to hold it right here until you pay me every nickel!'"

Between hypnotism, heredity, psychometry and clairvoyance, Mr. Thomas has introduced a lot of modern science into "The Witching Hour." He requires of his audience unlimited faith in a number of forces which most of the people who make up theatre audiences do not even know by name.

More than requiring faith, he commands it, for the time being, at least, and this, I submit, is a notable feat. David Warfield, assured in the course of some old musical comedy that "a barking dog never bites," used to say: "You know that, and I know it, but does the dog know it?" Mr. Thomas establishes his point with the dog. The essentials of a subject regarding which tomes have been written by Sir William Crookes, Sir Oliver Lodge, and Frederic William Henry Myers are taught entertainingly to skeptical Broadway in fifteen minutes of "The Witching Hour," and even those who remain skeptical allow the premise and accept seriously the consequent propositions.

The fourth act of the play, in which everything ends happily, goes a little too far. Brookfield, who has been a good fellow from the beginning, now becomes a good fairy, foster-fathering the young lovers, helping the villain to escape, and revealing an expertness in clairvoyance that, really possessed by any living creature, would disrupt commerce, dismember society, and turn the whole world upside down. Nevertheless, it is an interesting and agreeable act, in which loose strings are ingeniously gathered together and many fine bits of dialogue are spoken. The idea of a marriage between Brookfield and Mrs. Whipple being made possible by the gambler's discovery that he can read the minds of his fellow-players at cards, and that, therefore, he can no longer conduct "a square game," cannot be too highly praised. Then there is an admirable scene in which Brook-

field conquers Whipple's horror of cat's-eyes, and a preachment regarding the futility of hate that surpasses even Shaw's handling of the same subject in "Cæsar and Cleopatra." Though this is the weakest quarter of the play, Mr. Thomas does not need to take refuge behind Sardou's contention that "every dramatist should be allowed two dull acts—the first and the last."

So much space has already been devoted to the merits of "The Witching Hour," that I regret my utter inability to dismiss the piece without returning to praise of its lines. Speeches more finely literary, yet more easily colloquial, have never been spoken from our stage. Sharp, clear-cut, laconic, there is not a superfluous word in their make-up. The nice shades of distinction in such of the dialogue as bears upon character are remarkable, and the author's wit and pathos follow each other as sunshine follows shower. So commonplace a phrase as "I'll see what time it is," Mr. Thomas translates into "Let's look at the enemy." A gambler, protesting his poverty since the closing of Brookfield's, observes: "I can't sit in a gentleman's game until I've taken the scissors I used to cut coupons with and trimmed the whiskers off my shirt-cuffs."

The best work John Mason has ever done is revealed in his impersonation of Brookfield. He and Russ Whytal, who emerged from the years of obscurity that followed his starring tour in "For Fair Virginia" and made the biggest individual hit known to Broadway since Frank Keenan introduced us to Jack Rance, would be a delight if only because of their perfect enunciation. When you pay two dollars to attend the performance of a play, the privilege of actually hearing more than three intelligible words in a sentence seems a small thing to ask, yet I venture to say that we have not a hundred actors whose pronunciation is clear. Jennie Eustace is a fine actress of wide experience, yet she emphasized this merit of Mr. Whytal's by contrast when, in the second act, she asked of him: "Even at such a hour?" To which Mr. Why-

tal replied unaffectedly: "At any hour." Mr. Whytal's Judge Prentice is a fine study of character—mellow, dignified, suggestive of everything in the way of culture and mental attainment to be expected of a justice of the Supreme Court. Miss Eustace succeeded in being heartbroken without seeming maudlin in the part of Mrs. Whipple, and George Nash is wholly admirable as the scoundrel, Hardmuth. The roll of honor in connection with this production is precisely the length of the cast. To this list might well be appended the names of the Shuberts, who accepted Mr. Thomas's manuscript after it had been declined by two or three managers who struggled to get "The Ranger."

The last month of Autumn proved to be at once the best and the worst month of the current theatrical year. A few successes have done wonderful business, while the failures have been more decisive and more numerous than ever before. "The Merry Widow" and "The Thief" have turned away people at every performance, while one house—the Garrick—has changed its bill five times in six weeks. It is an interesting fact that fairly good plays no longer have a chance in New York; a production is a big hit or it is a fiasco. There is not an inch of middle ground, and the reason for this seemingly curious lack is not far to seek. Men buy poor clothes as well as good clothes because the poor ones are cheaper, but if all suits cost the same amount each man would try to make certain that he got the very best. Orchestra chairs are sold at an unvarying rate, whatever the grade of entertainment to be witnessed from them, and the consequence is that tickets for everything but great successes go a-begging. This condition will obtain until managers are willing to cut prices after unlucky first nights. Fanciful as such a scheme must appear, it may not be long before Broadway billboards bear announcements something like the following:

BARGAIN SALE!! Our February Offering
Orchestra Seats for
"THE BIG QUESTION"
Reduced from \$2.00 to \$1.68
COME EARLY AND AVOID THE RUSH!

Under such circumstances there might have been room in town for "Artie," "The Hoyden," "Miss Pocahontas," "The Step-Sister," "The Silver Girl," "Dr. Wake's Patient," and "The Girls of Holland." Truly, the last mentioned of these attractions would not have been much of a bargain at any price, for no one could imagine a more hopelessly puerile and unamusing comic opera than the collaborate work of Reginald de Koven and Stanislaus Stange presented at the Lyric. On the other hand George Ade's "Artie," though hardly worth the same admission fee asked for "The Merry Widow," might have made a strong appeal to economical gentlemen who understood that they could save money by preferring it. "Artie" was a mildly enjoyable farce, with occasional symptoms of real cleverness, but it lasted only two weeks at the Garrick. "Miss Pocahontas," by R. A. Barnet and a whole telephone-bookful of other authors and composers, had several good songs and one or two laughable lines. It might have prospered for a while at the Lyric marked down to seventy-five cents, with green trading stamps as a special inducement.

Daniel Frohman bought "Dr. Wake's Patient" for the use of Margaret Illington, and when the triumph of "The Thief" precluded the possibility of Miss Illington's requiring another play, he staged this four-act comedy by W. Gayer Mackay and Robert Ord for a special matinée at the Garrick. "Dr. Wake's Patient" might as fittingly have been entitled "Dr. Wake's Patience," since the story dealt with a young physician who tolerated more outspoken love-making from a young woman and more open-face watching from the rest of the cast than can be described in a paragraph. Ten minutes after the lifting of the first curtain everybody in the house, except the characters engaged in telling the tale, knew exactly what was going to happen. When, in the course of the third act, Dr. Wake exclaimed, "What a blind fool I've been and what a lot of time I've wasted," The Lady Who Goes to

the Theatre With Me declared: "That makes it unanimous!" Despite all this, the piece was amusing in a mild and obvious fashion—a rather entertaining example of Pale Play for Pink People. Mr. Frohman performed a service for our stage in introducing one of the authors of the comedy, Mr. Mackay, in the rôle of a good-humored hypochondriac. Whatever his literary defects, Mr. Mackay certainly is as clever a character actor as we have had recently out of England.

"The Step-Sister," by Charles Klein, was even a more awesome and explosive failure than "The Daughters of Men," its immediate predecessor from the pen of the man who wrote "The Lion and the Mouse." Two weeks after its premier at the Garrick, "The Step-Sister" crossed the great divide—which, in so far as it concerns dead plays, is the stream that runs between the theatres of Manhattan and the managerial store-houses of Jersey City. A few years ago, when audiences were not so quick at detecting false notes as now, the piece would have been a success. Today it is only in the popular-priced houses that inconsistencies go unnoticed. I recall a cheap melodrama, called "Nellie, the Beautiful Cloak Model," in which was applauded a line that would have provoked screams of laughter on Broadway. In the first act of this shilling-shocker the villain removed several slats from Brooklyn Bridge in order that the heroine might fall through and slap the East River. In the second act the same villain pushed this same heroine off a yacht in mid-ocean; in the third act he threw her under a freight elevator; and in the fourth act, when she repelled his advances, he blandly inquired: "Why do you fear me, Nellie?" This sort of thing doesn't do in the better theatres. When "the meanest millionaire in Wall street" made love to a girl who he saw for the first time since her childhood, and the very next day loaned her the trifling sum of ten thousand dollars, I foresaw the death of "The Step-Sister." Its tomb is a milestone

on the road along which our drama is progressing.

What the loan of ten thousand did for Mr. Klein's play was done by several similar incidents for "The Silver Girl," another work of the stage-stagey variety, presented at Wallack's. In this drama, Edward Peple, author of "The Prince Chap," dealt with the marital triangle which served Bronson Howard in "Aristocracy" and Frank Norris in "The Pit." Mrs. Jefferson Hunter, the lady of the triangle, met Nathan Hargrave for the first time in her life one sunny afternoon, and when, an hour later, she received a bunch of roses from him, she felt that she was going to be untrue to her husband, and sobbed copiously. Some excellent acting on the part of George Fawcett, in the rôle of Jefferson Hunter, was the chief excuse of "The Silver Girl."

Almost anything makes a star nowadays. Several thousands of people wanted to see Barney Oldfield in the mechanical reproduction of an automobile race, and so Elsie Janis, who happened to be part of the performance of "The Vanderbilt Cup," in which this race effect occurred, was brought to the Knickerbocker this year at the head of an organization presenting "The Hoyden." The piece, which fell utterly flat, was rewritten and afterward moved to Wallack's. Miss Janis is a pert, forward, self-confident young woman with a knack of mimicking other entertainers, and her repetition of thoroughly stale imitations of Eddie Foy, George Cohan and Ethel Barrymore can hardly be considered full return for an evening in an orchestra chair. "The Hoyden" itself proved to be pretty thin stuff, relating, none too humorously, the story of a girl who, fancying that her sister had been jilted, went after the jilter and fell in love with him. Subsequently, she discovered that sister had done the jilting, which was the cue for the finale. "The Hoyden" was helped by some rather catchy music, among the numbers being "Put Me Amongst the Girls," which is by Gus Edwards when it is

sung at Weber's Music Hall and by John L. Golden and Robert Hood Bowers when it was rendered at the Knickerbocker.

Four dramatizations were revealed in town during November, provoking the usual foolish critical chatter as to the impossibility of turning a novel into a drama. "A book's a book," said Walter Eaton, the clever reviewer of the *Sun*, "and a play's a play." A cow's a cow and a steak's a steak, but that's no reason why a fine, juicy beef-steak shouldn't be carved out of a cow. A story's a story, no matter whether the dramatist gets it from life or from printed pages, and the quality of the play into which it is made depends, not upon the source of the story, but upon its merit and the ability of the adaptor. Eugene Presbrey made a mess of Sir Gilbert Parker's "The Right of Way," but then many of its predecessors from the Presbrey pen were equally poor things if his own. The fact that it was taken from a printed narrative did not keep "The Morals of Marcus" from being infinitely superior to "The Step-Sister," which was entirely unknown to publishers. Most of Shakespeare's works were dramatizations, and scribes who utterly condemn the custom of giving theatrical form to books should remember that to this custom we owe such long-lived successes as "Around the World in Eighty Days," "Called Back," "Faust," "Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde," "Uncle Tom's Cabin," "Oliver Twist," "Camille," "East Lynne," "The Prisoner of Zenda," "Trilby," "Becky Sharp," "Tess of the D'Urbervilles," "Ben-Hur," "The Pit," "The Only Way" and "The Christian." Thus endeth the first lesson.

Guy Standing and Theodore Roberts appeared in "The Right of Way" at Wallack's just before the stage of that house was given over to "The Hoyden." The play was creakingly mechanical, without an evidence of inspiration or even of invention. "The Rejuvenation of Aunt Mary," arranged by Anne Warner from her story of the same title and acted by May Robson at the Garden, proved to be an inconsequent

and inconsistent comedy of the sort one expects to find when, marooned in a New England village, one allows oneself to be attracted by the promise of a show "at town hall tonight." When it is remembered that no genius ever wrote a line so witty that, spoken from the stage of a theatre, it could inspire the hilarity created by the spectacle of a boy sitting upon a tack, the reader will not be unduly impressed by my admission that there is much laughter at the Garden. A few speeches in the piece are honestly funny; it might easily be compressed into a twenty-minute monologue that would convulse the average vaudeville audience. As a three-hour entertainment it is watered stock, or any other inflated thing you please, except a play. Such episodes as that in which a supposedly sane woman sits up in bed turning the crank of an ice-cream freezer while her servant pushes her about so that she may imagine herself in an automobile, do not belong in a legitimate comedy. Aunt Mary is the female counterpart of Alvin Joslin and Joshua Whitcomb, but she has no counterpart in real life. I beg leave to call her author to President Roosevelt's attention as another nature-fakir.

A foredoomed dramatization was the version of "The Pilgrim's Progress," yclept "The Christian Pilgrim," in which Henrietta Crosman was seen for two weeks at the Liberty. It is incredible that Miss Crosman's management should have hoped to get anything other than a dull play out of this ancient work, and the extract made by James MacArthur would have had a fairer hearing if its incidental music had been the jangling of alarm-clocks. "Art thou for something rare?" inquired Mr. MacArthur in his prologue, and I would answer respectfully that, if Mr. MacArthur's somethings are to be like "The Christian Pilgrim," the rarer the better.

"The Morals of Marcus," which William J. Locke adapted from his popular novel, "The Morals of Marcus Ordeyne," and which had already

enjoyed a considerable success in England, re-introduced Marie Doro as a star at the Criterion. The piece provides two hours of good entertainment, much of which is agreeable and exhilarating to the intellect. This is particularly true of certain witty portions of the dialogue. Mr. Locke stigmatizes truth as "the *enfant terrible* of the virtues," sex as "the fundamental blunder of creation," and many other nouns as things that make epigrams.

The story of Marcus is singularly like that of Gerald Eversleigh in "My Wife," besides being strongly reminiscent of Martha Morton's "A Bachelor's Romance." Sir Marcus Ordeyne is a prosy old fellow, who has nothing to create a base discord in the even tenor of his life until Carlotta, daughter of an English mother, but reared in a harem, escapes therefrom and makes her way to his sober cottage at Surbiton. Marcus takes her in, and then, turn about being fair play, she takes him in, and he falls in love with her. About this time, the girl's original guardian, Hamdi Effendi, arrives from the harem to take her home, and Judith Mainwaring, who adores Marcus, unites with a gentleman named Sebastian Pasquale to make Carlotta believe that to save her protector from assassination she must run away with a dark man whose initials are S. P. Carlotta does so, but returns ruefully to marry Marcus and live happily ever after.

Personally, I don't think that ladies of the type of Carlotta and Kitty Ashe are to be found outside the pages of the six best sellers, but pretty little Miss Doro labored hard and almost successfully to make the rôle convincing. Hers was an obviously deliberated performance, bearing the earmarks of careful coaching, but it was fairly bursting with sweetness and charm. I have already intimated, in writing of "My Wife," that we have no actor in America with the skill of C. Aubrey Smith, who played Eversleigh in London and Ordeyne in New York. It would be difficult to conceive of the comedy without his graceful and intelligent as-

sistance. Beatrice Forbes Robertson was an impressive Judith, Forrest Robinson an admirable Hamdi, and Ivo Dawson a mild Pasquale. Rennold Wolf, writing in the *Morning Telegraph*, said, "When Pasquale threatened to stab Hamdi we knew that he would do it with a cream-puff."

If the curtain had droppethed mercifully like the gentle rain from heaven upon the place beneath and the third act five minutes sooner than it did, Rachel Crothers's second effort, "The Coming of Mrs. Patrick," would have won deserved success instead of undeserved failure at the Madison Square. Being a lady dramatist, Miss Crothers probably enjoyed writing the tawdry theatrical scene which spoiled the effect of the charming naturalness that had gone before, but she paid for her enjoyment at the rate of something like ten thousand dollars a minute, which is a little extravagant, even in these days.

It is impossible to account in any other way for the disaster that overtook Mrs. Patrick, since the remainder of the comedy was characterized by the same close observation and reproduction of the interesting commonplace of life, by the same fresh optimism and sweet, wholesome sentiment that won a season-long run for "The Three of Us." The Lady Who Goes to the Theatre With Me put the matter aptly when she remarked that, in witnessing the play, she felt like a Peeping Tom—should she have said Thomasina?—looking through an un-screened window at what went on inside her neighbor's house. Mrs. Patrick was a nurse who came into a family worn out by the long illness of the wife and mother. She brought brightness with her, saved the eldest son from jumping out of the frying-pan of domestic dulness into the fire of a disgraceful marriage, and finally won the heart of the handsome young doctor who had brought her to the disordered home. It was a charming little play—barring that five minutes—and charmingly played. I'm sorry you won't be able to see it.

A piece obviously written "after

Barrie," and a very long way after him, was Austin Strong's "The Toy-maker of Nuremberg," presented by Charles Frohman at the Garrick. "Peter Pan" is responsible for a widely-spread idea among authors that any wholly simple story is assured of success. There is a vast difference, however, between the simplicity of "Prue and I" and the simplicity of the First Reader, which is the brand employed by Mr. Strong. Any penny-a-liner can write simply; it takes a Barrie to admix with simplicity such poetry, sentiment, gentle good-humor and tender observation of human nature as will challenge admiration. None of these things was in "The Toy-maker of Nuremberg." Mr. Strong evidently meant to get over the footlights the quaint atmosphere of the old world. What he succeeded in getting over was a strong smell of grease paint.

The Toy-maker, whose wage for fashionabledolls had already been halved by the popularity of Teddy bears, had a son who painted eyebrows on the puppets and loved the daughter of his father's employer. When the capitalist in question found this out, catching two friends of the Toy-maker in the act of promoting an elopement, he discharged the Toy-maker. Father and son were about to go to America when another son appeared from Kansas City, with a fortune earned in the manufacture of Teddy bears, and brought happiness to everyone. W. J. Ferguson made the Toy-maker look like Sunny Jim, and acted him with clear uncertainty as to whether he was intended to be a comic or a pathetic figure. The rest of the cast was pretty uniformly pathetic. Mr. Frohman's imaginative production included two scenes that strongly suggested Maxfield Parrish.

Arnold Daly, returned to the managerial arms of Liebler & Co., is in the midst of his battle to establish, at the Berkeley Theatre, a short-story playhouse that shall be like the Capucines or the Antoine, in Paris. The effort, even in so far as it concerns this tiny auditorium, is not a new one. Frank

Keenan tried to make one-act dramas a success there, and failed utterly, though his short season included such gems as "The System of Doctor Tarr." We are a more normal people than the French, and I am inclined to think that we like our mental drink diluted. The horrors that delight the Parisians we avoid as much as possible, and C. M. S. McLellan's tiny tragedy, "The Shirkers," in which an amiable lady is murdered twice inside of thirty minutes, was not wildly applauded the night I visited the Berkeley. Nevertheless, there are many excellent points in "The Shirkers," which has an interesting philosophic narrative. John Belper, driven nearly insane by the solitude in which he lives, stabs his wife and is about to kill himself when he is prevented by Richard Murray, who is fleeing from the madding crowd. The two men talk over the situation and conclude that, since one is miserable because he lives alone and the other because he doesn't, they have only to exchange places to become happy. Belper takes Murray's keys and quits the house, where his successor finds the body of Margaret Belper and restores her to life. In the second scene, a year later, Murray is so wretched that he plans to return to the city, whereupon Margaret kills herself, just as her husband comes back, tired of the throng and longing for home. The second exchange occurs, and Belper, left to himself, discovers Margaret, really dead this time, lying where he left her when he went away a twelve-month before. The tragedy was wonderfully acted by Mr. Daly, Helen Ware and Holbrook Blinn, whose Belper was a masterpiece in miniature.

Mr. Daly's other bills at the Berkeley—he presents three sketches at each performance—have been "After the Opera," which was published in America originally in *THE SMART SET*; "The Van Dyck," a farce so surprising in plot that to describe it in advance would be a sin; "The Flag Station," and the vehicles of a quaint and kitteny Japanese woman named Hanako. This little Oriental Lotta is as truly an artist

as was Sada Yaco, and her work in the primitive comedietta, "A Japanese Lady," was one long—or rather, one short—delight. Mr. Daly's performances de luxe begin at nine o'clock, and should appeal strongly to persons of culture who estimate quality above quantity.

David Belasco's new theatre, the Stuyvesant, which was opened to the public on October 16th, represents everything that is modern and beautiful in the building of playhouses. The auditorium is much broader than it is deep, so that every spectator is within a few feet of the stage, and the harmony of its coloring constitutes a hue-poem in a minor key. Amber and golden browns, faded green blues, and dusty gray orange merge into an exquisite whole, to which various panel paintings by Everett Shinn give pleasant stopping places for the eye. Every source of artificial light is veiled by tinted glass, the result being a dim, religious glow, in which the most commonplace doings take on a certain artistic mystery, and in which the homeliest woman in the world would look lovely. Best of all is the subtraction of the usual raucous orchestra from the Stuyvesant. A few moments before time for the curtain to rise a fine chime of deep-toned bells rings out melodiously, and then the entertainment of the evening begins. Fresh from a week of play-going in which I had heard the waltz from "The Merry Widow" sawed off six times, and a pretty love scene preambled by "The Tattooed Man," I breathed a prayer of thanksgiving to considerate Mr. Belasco.

"A Grand Army Man" is another very ordinary drama galvanized into pulsing life by the stage management of Mr. Belasco and by the tenderness, the pathos, the inspiration of the finest actor on our stage, David Warfield. Whatever value there is in the play itself springs from the beauty of paternal love—the great, unyielding, unwavering, unquestioning love of an old man for the boy he has reared from babyhood. Wes' Bigelow is driver

of the stage and commander of the G. A. R. post of a town in Indiana. He has "brought up" Robert, son of a dead comrade, and Robert is very "sweet on" Hallie, the only daughter of Judge Andrews. His love makes the lad feel the need of a start in life, and so, influenced by a city sharper, he "invests" a thousand dollars with which the post has intended to make a payment on its new hall. Judge Andrews, angered at the lad's fondness for Hallie, sentences Robert to a term in the penitentiary, and Wes' waits for him with open arms until the term is over. That's all there is to "A Grand Army Man," but it has won out on the strength of its homely appeal and of the very wonderful performance of Wes' Bigelow given by Mr. Warfield. Excellent work is done also by William Elliott, whose impersonation of the boy is notably good; Howard Hall, Reuben Fax, James Lackaye, Stephen Maley, Antoinette Perry, and Marie Bates. The production, a masterly composite of exquisite detail, is one that must be seen to be believed.

Theodore Burt Sayre's new vehicle for Chauncey Olcott, called "O'Neill of Derry" and presented at the Liberty, is a perfectly grand play. In it the Irish D'Artagnan sings, loves, gambles, fights and runs away to live and fight another day in the fashion so familiar to his admirers. "O'Neill of Derry" has several ingenious situations and will be liked by those who like Mr. Olcott. The actor has a particularly tuneful lot of songs this season, the best of which is a delightful ballad entitled "Every Star Falls in Love With its Mate." It is not thought that the lyricist alluded to theatrical stars.

"Sappho and Phaon," a poetic tragedy by Percy Mackaye, which lasted a week at the Lyric, presented Sappho as a sort of ancient Mary Ellen Lease. The play had no single point of contact with human nature. The more I see of modern poetic tragedy the more I am inclined to tolerate musical comedy. Mrs. Patrick Campbell also came to the Lyric, where she devoted a week to her well-known

répertoire. She is to return later in the year.

The most sensational financial success of the season, and, in its field, the greatest artistic success, has been achieved at the New Amsterdam by Franz Lehar's history-making work, "The Merry Widow." This piece, which carries us nearer to opera bouffe than we have been in a decade, and which promises to bring a number its really creditable comic operas in of wake, is creating the same stir in New York that it did in London and Vienna. There is a reason. Someone has said that the modern musical comedy provides four laughs—one on the composer, one on the librettist, and two on the manager. "The Merry Widow" provides a hundred, and they are all *with* the people responsible for the production. The book, by Victor Leon and Leo Stein, is so excellent that, divorced from the score, it might be played successfully as a farce. The music is delightful. The presentation affords a series of pictures that are a treat to the eye. Ethel Jackson is satisfactory as the widow, a rôle in which the Alice Nielsen of five years ago would have been ideal, and Donald Brian is a delightful Prince Danilo. I know of no better two dollars' worth of entertainment than "The Merry Widow."

Another musical performance deserving of the highest commendation is "Tom Jones," which was composed by Edward German and offered for the first time in this country at the Astor. Henry W. Savage describes the piece as "a real comic opera," and, while little of it is real comic, most of it is real opera. The libretto is legitimately amusing, and gives opportunity for picturesque staging. That part of it in which William Norris is seen in his finely artistic and unctuously funny impersonation of a village barber, is particularly enjoyable. The score, though not so catchy as that of "The Merry Widow," is equally colorful and musicianly.

If you can truly enjoy "a little nonsense now and then," don't fail to see

"The Top o' th' World" at the Majestic. You will laugh yourself into rotund corpulence at the antics of Fred Bailey and Ralph Austin, as a Jack-in-the-Box and a Candy-Kid; at the drolleries of Arthur Hill, as a polar bear; and at the ponderous unfemininity of George W. Monroe as Aurora Borealis. You will admire Kathleen Clifford's cunning impersonation of a ten-year-old girl, and be charmed by dainty Anna Laughlin as an Eskimo belle. The piece, which is a kind of combination of "The Babes in Toyland" and "The Wizard of Oz," is chock full of rollicking good humor and of whistleable melody. Its novelties are many, the pleasantest being a dance in which six pretty girls are assisted by as many beautiful dogs. "The Top o' th' World" is as great a relief from the Broadway musical comedy, with its spot-lighted stars and its automobilized chorus, as are "The Merry Widow" and "Tom Jones."

The new show at the Hippodrome is the usual colossal and bewildering combination of color, movement and music. It is known as "The Auto Race," and was put together, as were its predecessors, by Edward P. Temple, with a score by Manuel Klein. The first scene reveals "a road-house near a Long Island village," where the cast and chorus are assembled for what the programme calls "the event known as an auto race." This event concludes the act, lamps representing those on the cars increasing in size in the darkness to give the effect of approaching machines, until, finally, the winning racer comes from the back drop down to the footlights. The device fozzled on the first night, but doubtless has been brought up to the expectations of the management since then.

In the second portion of the performance, supposed to be a lawn-party following the contest, the regular circus bill is given. The two most interesting acts are those of Marcel and Rene Philippart, who contribute a graceful exhibition of the game called Diabolo, and the Mirza Golem troupe of Persian gymnasts and acrobats. The third

act presents a spectacle and ballet labeled "The Four Seasons." In this act, which is gorgeously staged, and which brings the Hippodrome tank into use, there are four tableaux, epitomizing Spring, Summer, Autumn and Winter. Each is appropriately set, the costumes are of apple blossoms or poppies or dying leaves, and the dance itself is intended to suggest the quarter of the year which it represents. When the finale is reached, the water in the tank becomes ice, covered with skaters and sleigh-riders, while the background is filled with merrymakers, who pelt one another with snow-balls.

Despite all its gaud and glory, the performance is not quite the equal of those that have gone on before. There is no one big feature, like the mermaids of "Neptune's Daughter," and so the spectator carries away rather a confused mental picture without any particular projection sticking above the horizon of memory. On the opening

night, there was too much unintelligible song and story and not enough fun, though a better balance has probably been struck by this time. A little more of Marceline, the Hippodromio, and a little less dialogue would help. Criticism of so big a spectacle, however, must always be futile. The Hippodrome is its own standard, and its managers claim no more than the truth when they advertise: "In all the world no show like this."

At the time of writing, the plays worth seeing in New York were "The Witching Hour," "The Thief," "A Grand Army Man," "The Man of the Hour," "My Wife," "The Morals of Marcus," "The Round Up," "The Chorus Lady," and those presented by Arnold Daly. Musical pieces of merit were "The Merry Widow," "Tom Jones," "The Girl Behind the Counter," "The Top o' th' World" and the show at the Hippodrome.



THE CYNIC

By Theodosia Garrison

I SAY it to comfort me over and over,
 Having a wearisome heart to beguile,
 Never had woman a tenderer lover—
 For a little while.

Oh, there never were eyes more eager to read her
 In her saddest mood or her moments gay;
 Oh, there never were hands more strong to lead her—
 For a little way.

There never were tenderer promises given
 Of love that should guard her the ages through,
 As great, enduring and steadfast as heaven—
 For a week or two.

Well, end as it does, I have had it, known it;
 For this shall I turn me to weep or pray?
 Nay, rather I laugh that I thought to own it
 For more than a day.

THE LURE OF WOMAN

By John G. Neihardt

I HAD unlaced one boot and was preparing to rest my feet, wearied with the lifting of hobnails. The ascents on the Bear Gulch trail are steep and many, and here at last was the pine-clad apex, cool and sweet in spite of the meridian glare. Down through a forest alley that widened out toward the bottom of a gulch a thousand feet below me, I saw the black and purple hills, at once convulsed and silent like a sea of ink struck dumb and motionless at the height of tempest.

A lonesome, lonesome world! Just as the good God left it with the red mud sticking to His fingers, save for the fire-blackened pines that smuttled the distant slopes—typical of the blighting touch of man.

An eagle wheeling round a sun-washed crag—and silence! And yet, thirty years ago, I mused, these gulches knew the sound of many feet driven thither by the lust for gold. There where the sun-warped sluice-boxes now litter the gulches was played a portion of the old, old serio-comedy of Man. Yonder was a village of log huts. That larger one there, with the sunflowers blooming on its rotted roof, was a dance hall. Delirious fiddles squawked there through the nights that are dead, and heavy boot heels thumped and women laughed and men fought and dug for gold and went away—many of them feet first.

Thirty years—and the ground-hogs live here now!

Hist!

Through the thin air grew up the unmistakable Punch-and-Judy whine of a cheap phonograph—"Vi-o-lin so-lo, Schu-bert's Ser-e-nade, played by—"

and then the invisible machine went off into a correct imitation of a distant sawmill, only to emerge the next moment in the sweetest music I have ever heard. For one does not hear music entirely with the ears, you know.

It was the Voice of the old days crying up in the wilderness: all the yearning and the gladness and the sadness and the sin and the striving and the going away—and the coming to nothing after it all. It overwhelmed me like a personal grief. And when the last thin silver thread of sound, questioning, groping outward, lost itself in the silence, a sense of the ultimate shipwreck of human things came upon me. It seemed very futile that one should be glad or be sad or *be* at all—unless, perchance, one might be a sunflower or an eagle wheeling eternally about a sun-washed crag.

I laced up my boot and plunged on down the steep trail carpeted with the pine needles of many seasons. Suddenly I found myself in a narrow gulch with a log cabin on either side of me, and I was aware of a voice near-by:

"Going anywhere, stranger?"

In the doorway of the nearest cabin stood a tall, powerfully built old man, with long gray hair and a riotous growth of grizzled whiskers which were carefully braided at the end and thrust in under the flap of his shirt.

My first glance at his face gave me the vague impression of having caught sight of something strong and noble through a drifting fog.

"Why, yes, I'm going to Bear Gulch," I answered; "but just now I am looking for the man with the phonograph."

"This is Bear Gulch and I'm the

man," said he; "what there is left of us. Come in!" he added, smiling under his whiskers, no doubt, for his steel-blue eyes grew momentarily soft and welcomed me.

I glanced about and took a mental snapshot of the place. A long row of tumbledown log houses skirting a melancholy creek-bed littered with rotted sluice-boxes and distorted with old placer diggings—that was Bear Gulch. On each side the pine-clad hills rose abruptly to a strip of sky.

I entered the house and, taking the offered chair, glanced about the rude interior. A rickety, greasy table, several chairs, an old cupboard, a decrepit cook-stove, a bookshelf and a phonograph—these are what I saw.

"So you came to see Bear Gulch?" said the old man in a deep kindly voice. I stepped over to the bookshelf and hastily ran over the titles. "Well, the tides of the world have turned away from Carthage," continued the old man, "and all you see is Marius in the ruins—playing a phonograph!" he added, with a chuckle.

"What!" I exclaimed, lifting my eyes from the book titles; "Catullus and Ovid and de Musset and Baudelaire and Schopenhauer—and Schubert in the wilderness?"

"Why not?" said the old man. "Every man walks in his own world. When he's young it's a world of people and things; when he's old it's a world of ghosts." And suddenly, as he turned his grizzled countenance upon me, I felt that vague depression I have often noticed when a dull gray day dies out in thickening fog.

All this time the old man was busy preparing a meal, taking it for granted that I would eat with him. It is the Western way.

We sat down to bacon and potatoes.

"You have mining interests hereabouts, no doubt?" I queried.

"Well," answered he, "it's hardly that. I manage to pan out an occasional grubstake."

Here was a new type of the placer gambler indeed! I had run upon a number in my wilderness rambles, and

all of them saw fortunes in the next clean-up. I searched his face and saw nothing but gray depths.

"I wonder that you stay here," I said. "You are not at all like the others. You have breathed upper air. You are not gold mad. Surely there is another world for you."

He fixed haunted eyes upon me—eyes eloquent of the great human ache.

"But if one has burned his bridges and can't cross over?"

"But one should never burn bridges!"

"Ah—Youth said that. Age knows better."

I accepted the rebuke at its face value; but I had decided to spend at least one night at Bear Gulch if my host would keep me. For I had often said I would rather have the human story of the Black Hills than all their gold; and here before me was the articulate ghost of Bear Gulch.

The afternoon passed away with commonplace chats (interspersed with phonograph selections), and I succeeded in learning little about the man except that his name was Samuel St. John; that he was one of the first in the diggings; that he had taken a master's degree in an Eastern university before coming West; that he had rather more than a speaking acquaintance with the gods of Art; that he had too much of the artistic temperament for his own good; and that I was a welcome guest.

We had eaten supper; candles and pipes had been lit. Conversation had languished and I was succeeding admirably with my smoke rings. I watched them twirling upward in the yellow glow to disappear in the dusk among the cobwebbed rafters.

A defective ring broke the thread of my musings. I glanced at my host. He sat with his chin in his hands and his elbows on his knees. His body was shaken with deep breathings. His eyes, fixed upon the wall, glowed with an intense light, and some sudden gust of yester-year had blown up the embers in the ashes of his face.

I followed the line of his gaze. I saw on the wall a very clever water-color of a dancing girl, and I marveled

that I had overlooked it. Perhaps it was the unsteady glow of the sputtering candles that gave it life for me now. Perhaps it was the hour. Perhaps both. Or had something subtle in the gaze of the old man gone into it and vitalized it?

There she stood poised on tiptoe, seeming to float in the glare of the footlights. A thing diaphanous—a vision of joy wrought of the stuff of dreams! One little gust of music from the hushed orchestra, and she would float off into the delirious mazes of the dance!

I smelled apple-blossoms—this was May incarnate!

One little flute note down there! One thin, questioning bird note, O Clarinet, and you shall have June madness! Green bows shall burst into a pink and white flame of bloom! See! Her warm, glowing arms are lifted for wings. Quick, one gust of melody! Silence still? She smiles upon you, O you Violins! For what can she be waiting then—can it be for the music of yesterday? Were I a violin—

Suddenly the old man began to talk, his eyes fixed upon the picture. You have heard the deep, yearning notes of a 'cello grow up out of the intensity of an orchestral silence. The old man's voice was something like that. He seemed unconscious of my presence.

"Just so she looked—over thirty years ago. Why, it was only yesterday, after all. Thirty years is not long. I remember that first night. I was at the theatre. The room was stuffy, charged with that subtle human essence that always got on my nerves. I was yawning; I felt a little bored. Then the curtain bell rang. I hear it yet—oh, so clear and piercing it comes to me now—like a stroke of doom.

"The orchestra wakened in a storm of sound. Cymbals clashed! Fiddles went mad! And the curtain went up. I remember that it had a picture of a ship on it—an impossible painted ship sailing nowhere, I am sure.

"The scene was a tawdry forest. No bird could have sung in such trees; at least I felt sure no bird ever did. And then—a sudden dazzling brilliance from

the wings! A twinkle of mirth-mad feet! A vision of delirious pink flesh borne upon the storm of sound! Then—with a crash—the music stopped; and there before the footlights, balanced lightly upon tiptoe, she hovered in the heavy hush—a glittering human star!

"The galleries thundered with applause, and I caught myself hating every single individual in the cheering mob. Why was there not a great hush? This thing was holy in its beauty. The forest changed and was a forest not of this world. The leaves rustled in the light dream-wind. Heavy intoxicating odors clung in the shadow of those branches, and strange scarlet songbirds made music in the silence. A little further, just a little back in the secret bowers, strange gaudy wildflowers bloomed—sweet and poisonous and alluring. I smelled them, oh, so faintly!

"A thin, clear flute-note—like the coming of Summer dawn—then a steadily increasing wind of melody blowing in from eternity, and she floated off into the enchanted forest, threading the mystic shadows like a sunray; now perceived as a delicious scent, now as a ravishing sound, now as a brilliance."

The old man sank back in his chair and dropped his gaze from the picture. A tear ran slowly down his gray beard, and I watched it curiously, feeling an odd sense of relief when it had disappeared.

"I am not sure that I do not love her myself," I ventured, wishing to lessen the strain of the moment; for it is not pleasant to hear an old man sob. There is a certain compensating music about the sob of a woman; but an old man—he sobs too far down in the throat.

"All men loved her," continued the old man. "She was made for that. She was Woman, not a woman; and she was as little for one man as the Venus de Medici. Just so is the great Hermes for all women. Some are born that way.

"I was young then," he went on; "I thought I had grown old; it seems not—it seems not. It is a strong drink,

this wine of woman; but God pity the man who never drank it."

During the silence that followed I felt much as one who looks upon a gray October sky and is suddenly blinded by a flash of lightning. June fires across the brow of Winter!

Doubtless this was the prelude to the old man's heart-story. I wondered how many sleepless nights he had spent in rehearsing it, expanding it in all its little details, making it beautiful that it might not hurt so much.

I mused: And after all what came of it? Did she grow old and fat? Did this sensuous May of bursting bows and sweet scents and rioting color become December? Or did she die one night in the ecstasy of the dance? Or, better still, float away amid the heavy odors of that enchanted forest never to return? Would that all fair things could have such a passing!

"She was eighteen," continued the old man at length. "They called her Joy. I had just passed twenty-three. With the beautiful egotism of youth I felt that she had been born for me. It seemed that from the beginning of time she had been swinging toward me—a star of destiny.

"I married her. Then followed one wild, sweet year. She was all women in one, and yet so much a child—an untamed, wilful child. Could one wish Joy to be otherwise?

"We toured Europe, and I left no desire of hers unfulfilled. It seemed that this new life would go on forever. But at the end of a year I found myself broken in fortunes. We returned to America. After champagne one takes unwillingly to beer, and I cast about me desperately for the means with which to revive the twelvemonth dream. I applied to my father and he coldly advised me to go into some business, beginning at the bottom. But I was young, and I had ridden Pegasus; Trade appeared a miserable carthorse to me.

"And then came the Black Hills gold excitement. Here was a quest after my own heart. I was always something of a Jason. I left her with relatives in the East and started West."

The old man carefully refilled his pipe, lit it, and clouded his face in smoke. Many minutes passed, during which my thoughts ran on capriciously, tentatively fashioning ending after ending for this interrupted story of Joy. But out of the glorious flame and dazzle of her I could get nothing but smoke and ashes in the end. I shuddered.

At length: "And what became of Joy?" I said.

His face slowly emerged from the smoke cloud—gray out of gray.

"There was a friend," he said, scarcely above a whisper.

A silence fell. I closed my eyes, and in the darkness passed before me in a riot of flame the haughty forms of Paris and Tristan and Lancelot; and behind them, ghostly in the half-light, the three sad kings of story.

"His name was Louis Devlin," continued the old man. "I met him in Sidney at a gambling-table. I hadn't enough money left to carry me into the gold country, and I was making my last fool's prayer to luck before I stepped out into the dark. I had three kings, I remember, and the pot was big. Three of the other four players stayed and Louis was among them. I can see him across the table yet—a dapper, well-made little man with a fair face, half woman's, and a riot of black curls about his pale, high forehead.

"My turn came. I pushed my last chips to the centre and dropped my hand face up. I shut my eyes, just as a man might do who stands upon the drop door with the rope about his neck, awaiting the fall into night. It all flashed before me—the night at the theatre and the wild, sweet year that followed. But now it seemed very far away—almost like a tale told by a stranger. I felt choked and dizzy. I lost my nerve and I no longer believed in luck.

"I was aroused by a harsh guttural voice cursing and accusing someone of stealing aces. I opened my eyes and saw Louis Devlin with his white, slender hand on the big pot, four aces before him

and a half-smile on his lips. His big, quiet, dark eyes were fixed steadily upon Bill Wells, who held a cocked six-shooter. Wells was known to be a gun fighter and a general bad man; yet Devlin, with his eyes fixed on the other, slowly raked in the chips. I don't know how long they sat staring at each other. It seemed hours. But finally Wells got up and thrust his gun into its holster. 'Well, I'll be damned!' said he. He shambled, grumbling, over to the bar. 'Too damned pretty for a corpse,' he remarked to the bartender as he ordered drinks for the house. The game broke up.

"I slouched into a dark corner and dropped into a chair. I felt sick and prickly all over. I was done for, and I was wondering dazedly whether or not I should write to her before I stepped out—and what I should say.

"Someone tapped me on the shoulder and it was Louis Devlin.

"Down to the cloth?" he asked, smiling.

"Down to the cloth!" I groaned.

"I knew it. It was written all over your face, my friend, for you are *not* a good gambler. Take this."

"He carelessly thrust a wad of bills into my hand. It was the whole pot. My pride arose. 'I lost,' I said, thrusting the bills toward him: 'I lost everything, but I lost!' Strange, how one's pride dies last.

"Oh, hell, keep it," he said lightly. "Going to the gold country, aren't you? So am I. Going up to mine the miners, you know. Pay me back when you strike it rich"; and he hurried away."

The old man mused for several minutes.

"Did you ever think what would happen," he said at length, "if you should meet the Devil face to face?"

"Why, no," I answered.

"You would love him! It is only human."

More smoke and silence; and then:

"I think I gave my soul for that roll of bills. From that time to this I have never been the same. Some-

thing went out of me—I can't explain it.

"I moved on with the gold-mad herd—a part of the flotsam and jetsam at the lip of the westering flood of civilization. Louis and I traveled together and we became fast friends. He was so irresponsible, so prodigal with both his easily gotten money and his inexhaustible high spirits, so pardonably vain of his personal appearance, clean and neat as a cat and brave to the limit. Or should I say audacious? He took on none of the frontier swagger so quickly acquired by the mob, and I can't remember his ever packing a gun but once. They called him 'The Dude,' yet he had a way with him that made him ace high with even the lowest.

"We struck the Southern Hills together; but all the creeks were staked, and even worthless ground was selling at a ridiculous figure. One day Louis, who had been 'mining the miners' with his usual success, came to me just as I had reached the crisis of a spell of homesickness and discouragement. He clapped me on the back. 'Cheer up, Sam!' said he jovially; 'you're not half dead! Big doings up north in a place they call Nigger Hill—heard of it? They're taking them out of the grass roots as big as your fist! Come on, we're going north!'

"He had something of the character of destiny about him. We started north and landed here in Midsummer.

"Well, I struck it rich—stuck my pick into a fortune the first week; worked my claim all that Fall, and when the Winter came I found myself comfortably rich. Why didn't I go back?"

A light of hate blazed up in the old man's eyes.

"Oh, the damned stuff drove me mad! I wanted more, more, more! I would stay another year, just another year, and I would go back in regal splendor. Surely the girl could wait one short year. The girl? Joy? She had grown a little dim through the blazing dream of gold in which I walked. Very faintly my old self dying within me cried out against my madness. But I quieted

the voice by thinking: 'It is all for her, all for her; she shall be a queen among men; it is all for her!' And I gave my madness one more year.

"Bear Gulch was booming. Log houses went up. A stream of gold-mad adventurers poured in steadily. Fever was in the air. Up and down the street, where the creek flows so quietly now, men picked and shoveled and sluiced and panned; and all the gulches hereabouts were filled with the clank of shovels, the gushing of the boxes, the hissing of the pans.

"So Devlin and I started a saloon and gambling-house. It was a paying scheme. The successful drank and gambled by way of self-congratulation; the homesick and heartbroken spent their last in the hope of deadening despair. And so the nuggets and the glittering dust poured into our sack. We took it all as it came; and I have seen many a haggard man drop his last pinch of dust into the scales, take a drink and go out staggering into the night, although he had drunk little.

"We were a town of devils, all mad for the damned yellow stuff heaved straight up from hell!"

The old man paused for a moment while the soft light came back to his eyes.

"Every mail from the East brought me a letter from the girl begging me to come home. Yet I stayed, sending back glowing pen pictures of our future. But one day I received a letter saying that she had started West. I might have known she would do that. It was so like her—the wish always brought the deed.

"One evening in July she stepped out of the stage, and then began the reign of a Queen in Bear Gulch. The whole atmosphere was changed, and there was a softening of hearts throughout the diggings. Old one-eyed Pete, the wildest man that ever went back to the beast, lost his desire to get roaring drunk and shoot things up, and the battle light went out of his lone eye. About the gambling-tables at night men talked freely of their folks back in the States—an unheard-of condition of

affairs! It suddenly became the fashion to have a sister or a mother or a wife somewhere in the world. I could feel the growing ascendancy of the Queen in the falling off of daily receipts. But I didn't mind; the girl was so happy; and somehow gold-madness began to lose its grip on me.

"She spent much of her time flitting about the diggings, chatting with the miners. It mattered little to her what their antecedents might have been—and God knows some of them were bad enough. 'They are *men*, oh, such glorious men!' she would say to me; 'Plain honest blood and bones and not ashamed of it!'

"Oh, she was a pagan from her little pink toes to the crown of her golden head, and as little bound by convention as a nymph. But one little breath against her honor, and there would have been killings in Bear Gulch."

The old man drew a deep breath and held it for a moment, throwing his head back with a spasmodic jerk as one who chokes. With wide eyes he stared into the dusk among the rafters, and after a slow, shuddering sigh, he fixed searching eyes upon me.

"If the two whom you loved most in all the world," he said, "should ask you for the dearest thing to you in all the world—what would you do?"

I did not answer, for I felt that the question was thrown through and far beyond me. The old man leaned back in his chair and closed his eyes.

"The frost came," he went on in a low voice; "the many-colored fires of Fall ran up the jack oaks; the wild grapes were purple. The afternoon was golden. I sat in the bar-room alone, staring out down the gulch where the Autumn colors blazed against the green of the pines and spruces. I was thinking of the East; I had about decided to take her back.

"The door opened, and Devlin came in. His face was paler than usual and his eyes were unusually brilliant. He sat down beside me and placed his white hand on my shoulder, looking me square in the eyes.

"'Sam,' said he at length, 'I love your wife!'

"I laughed. 'Who in Bear Gulch does not?'" said I.

"'But this is different,' said he. 'She—loves—me!'

"It was as though a big fist had struck me, beating the blood into my eyes. A hell of murder flared up within me, only to die out suddenly, leaving me limp and sick and dazed.

"A big bottle-fly was struggling up the dirty window-pane. It buzzed and boomed, filling all the awful hollowness with infernal noises. Sometimes in the long nights I hear it yet—so loud that I can't sleep. I watched it winning and losing, losing and winning, until it reached the top, only to fall back again buzzing and booming. And all the while little stinging flashes of light went through my brain; disjointed snatches of ballet-music and songs she used to sing to me came and went, came and went in my head. Jumbled pictures of big moments from our wild, sweet year together flitted before me as from rapidly moving lantern-slides. A hellish battle went on within me, scarcely distinguished from the struggle of the bottle-fly on the dirty pane.

"I looked at Louis, and, strange as it may seem, my heart ached for him. The room swam about me dizzily; the infernal buzzing of the fly on the pane filled the world with sounds of fever. And in that moment I tore out my heart and gave it to my friend.

"'Let us go to her,'" I said. And it seemed that some dying man in the room had uttered the words ever so faintly. All the way to the house my own words haunted me like a sentence of death."

My host had risen and was pacing nervously up and down the room.

"Two great loves are given to a man in this world," he said. "One is for a woman and the other for a man. What if each destroys the other?"

"We went to her. She was crying. I knew that I had lost. A great calm I could not understand came over me—a great aching calm. I seemed above it all, looking down on it, and I felt only a great quiet pity. I was like an in-

nocent man condemned, who knows that it is all over with him, and in the final hour pities his judge and executioner for their deeds.

"Weeping, she confessed it all. She wanted to go with him. She begged me not to feel hard against him. Not a word for herself—all for him.

"It was the law of Nature against the law of Man—and I had lost. I spent that night in hell, cursing myself for a coward. I longed to be as any other man in Bear Gulch would have been in my place. God help me, I prayed for the heart of a murderer. But I could not feel anger for Louis; and yet, I do not believe I am a coward; I have faced good men in my time.

"In the morning I said to Devlin: 'I have lost everything—but I have lost.' And it struck me as a curious thing that I should have said the same words to him at Sidney when he first came into my life. 'Take her back to the States,' I said. 'Get a divorce for her on any grounds you like; I shall not interfere. Marry her and stay by her; and if you don't I'll know of it some way and I'll be after you.'

"He swore it by all that he held holy. He gave me his hand. 'Sam,' said he, 'God knows I'm sorry, but I can't help it.' And with the ache of his own treachery gnawing at my heart I loved him even then.

"I stumbled off down to the saloon and got dead drunk; and when I came to it was night and hell had broken loose in Bear Gulch. The bar-room was full of miners in all stages of drunkenness; they had helped themselves to the liquors. Old quarrels that had been forgotten for months had been revived. Occasional pistol-shots rang out in the street. Blood madness was in the air. A noisy, maudlin mob of brutes jostled about the bar. One word awry would have hurled them at each others' throats.

"Old one-eyed Pete shamled around behind the bar and shook me violently where I lay half-dazed. He was drunk like the rest and hot tears trickled shamelessly from his solitary eye. 'Wake up here, Sam!' he growled.

'What in hell's up?' Murder was in his face. 'What in hell's up? Is this here deal square? I want to know! Is it square? 'Cause if it ain't, I want to know!' 'It's square, Pete,' I said. 'It hurts, but it's square with me.' 'Cause if it ain't I want to know damn quick!' he repeated drunkenly. He pulled his guns and swung them savagely at the mob. 'And if there's a son of a she-wolf in this here house that's got anything to say again' that gal, I want to know!'

"All Bear Gulch was of one opinion, and one word from me would have sent them howling into the night on the trail of Devlin. But I swore to them that it was square."

The old man paused to fill and light his pipe. He endeavored to assume calmness, but his trembling hand could scarcely hold the match to the bowl.

"Deep wounds have a way of healing over at the top. Things went on—there was day and there was night. But the bottom had dropped out of the world for me. I drank more than was good for me and gambled overmuch. Fortune seemed to have turned against me all at once. I lost large sums every day. I never was a good gambler, and now I hadn't even the desire to win. What was the use?"

"Deep snows came—it was a bitter Winter. Months passed, and yet I had heard nothing from Devlin. But I believed in the oath he had given me at parting—it was the one belief I had left."

"One day in March Frank Sears, who had just come over the trail from Deadwood, dropped into the saloon. He called for whisky, swallowed a half-dozen in as many gulps, and fixed questioning eyes upon me. 'Any damned skunk you want me to kill over Deadwood way?' he asked."

"'Not that I recollect just now,' I replied."

"'Oh, if you can't recollect,' he said sneeringly, 'of course not; but I was going that way, and it wouldn't be any extra trouble. *Sure* you don't want anybody killed over there?' He started toward the door."

"'Who the devil is in Deadwood?' I asked."

"'Just Devlin,' he answered."

"'What! Devlin?'"

"'Been playing there with the devil's own run of luck for the last two months.'"

"'And the girl?' I gasped; for the old ache that the whisky had held away came back and gripped me at the throat."

"'Oh, down in the foothills on Sand Creek eating snow-balls!'"

The old man got up and began pacing the floor again.

"I took the Sand Creek trail. The snow was deep, and how I made the trip I hardly know. I plunged on all day. Night fell, and I plunged on toward the foothills, following the creek. Some time in the night, I don't know how late, I saw a candlelight in the window of a miserable little log hut. I knocked at the door."

"A wild, shrill cry, half terror and half joy, came from within. It was more like the cry of a famished beast than anything else I have heard: 'Louis! Louis!'"

"The door was thrown open."

"If I live ten thousand years, I shall never have another moment like that. It was Joy! My God, and such a Joy! Thin and haggard and sallow she was. The pinch of anxiety and suffering and hunger had distorted her face. Her eyes were wild and big with much weeping. Her glorious golden hair, that had been as the sun of my life, clung in slovenly tangles about her drawn face."

"She sprang back from me, and her face went cold and savage. The candlelight struck her full length, and I saw that which drove me mad. She was going to be a mother, and she was near her time. 'When did the skunk leave you?' I cried; for the heart of the murderer, for which I had prayed, was granted me at last."

"With a sharp, whining cry she sprang at me like a starved wildcat that battles for its young. She poured forth an insane torrent of abuse upon me. She defended Devlin and cursed

me. Her rage was pitiful, but terrible in its headlong impotence. I seized her in my arms and held her close, and she broke down and wept hysterically."

The old man with clenched fists and dry, savage eyes paced up and down the floor.

"It's hell—this woman business—it's hell!" he said over and over. After some moments his eyes softened and grew wet. "I brought her back here; I carried her in my arms all the way. She had grown light—so pathetically light. I think I never loved her more than when she lay helpless in my arms—all mine again. No, not *all* mine; for I carried two—and one was Devlin's; but I loved them both for her sake.

"I can feel her big hungry eyes upon me yet as she lay in bed awaiting her time. Two weeks it was; and every day she begged for Louis, begged me not to kill him. She clutched my hand with her thin weak hands and begged me over and over not to kill him. But I could not promise.

"And by-and-bye the time came. She was too weak with the worry and the hunger and the cold of those two months to face the ordeal. She died—they both died—and with her last breath she begged for Louis."

The old man lapsed into a long silence. He seemed very calm but for an occasional nervous tremor. I caught myself gritting my teeth and clenching my fists. "Quick!" I said at length. "Tell me that you hunted him down!"

"Ah, Louis Devlin was not a coward," he answered. "Whatever his weaknesses might have been, and God knows he was both weak and strong, he was not a coward. There was no need of my hunting him down. He came to me.

"It was one moonlit April night. I was at the saloon; I never left the place now. I was stunned with it all, and could not think clearly enough to act. Sometimes a desire to kill flamed up in me, only to die out at once. But most of the time I was only sick at heart.

"There were a dozen in the saloon sitting sullenly at the gambling-tables.

The door opened—and Louis stood there in a flood of moonlight! Quick as a flash a dozen guns were whipped out and leveled on him. He didn't flinch. He folded his arms and gazed at me with eyes of sorrow. He seemed unconscious of the others. Just so the hero of a melodrama might appear, calm before death, with folded arms, awaiting the end—and the applause of the galleries. Louis was always acting; sometimes I think that was the secret of his nature.

"Hold up!" I cried to the men. They turned faces of disgust upon me and put up their guns. "I wish to speak with you, Sam," said Louis.

"I followed him out into the moonlit night. He walked rapidly down the gulch, and I followed as in a dream. We came to an open space in the underbrush. A dazzling flood of moonlight fell upon the place. Louis turned and faced me. 'Do not accuse me, Sam,' said he, with little trace of emotion in his voice; 'and ask no explanations. There is only one thing for me to do now; I am ready. Back to back—fifteen steps apiece—and fire.'

"I obeyed mechanically. We stood back to back; we walked fifteen paces, Louis giving count. I wheeled about and fired wild. Louis did not move. His face was uplifted and the white light struck it full.

"Like a man in a nightmare, and with no seeming effort of mine, I took a slow, cool aim at the face cut clear against the dusk. I set my teeth; I meant to kill him at last.

"Suddenly a strange madness seized me. I saw *her* there before him, with her thin arms about his neck. She seemed made of mist and moonlight—transparent. All the night seemed suddenly filled with a woman's wailing—*Oh, do not kill him, do not kill him!* Strangely enough, the famous line ran through my head: 'Woman wailing for her demon lover.' Over and over, with inconceivable rapidity it passed through my brain.

"My pistol arm trembled, though I summoned all my strength to hold it still. I fired again and closed my eyes

to shut out the ghostly vision. I waited for the shot that I felt sure would come, for I knew that I had missed again. I waited for the shot—I longed for it.

"It seemed that hours passed, and still I waited. When at length I opened my eyes the moonlit space before me was empty. He had vanished."

For the last time in his story the old man hesitated.

"And was that the end?" I said.

"It was not the end—sometimes I wish it had been," he answered. Then a cold light came into his eyes that stared with dilated pupils through and far beyond the dark window. He seemed as one who gazed upon a thing of horror coming from a distance. He scarcely breathed. Involuntarily I followed the direction of his gaze, half expecting to see the Thing of Doom that seemed moving down upon us out of the shadow.

"Some hellish affinity brought us together at Sidney," he went on, "and the same devilish attraction held us together till the bitter end of it all."

"After that moonlit night I did not see him for three years; three years of drunkenness and ruinous gambling. Yet every day I longed for him; in my drunken dreams I longed for him. It was not the longing of love; it was mania. I hungered for another sight of his white face—a face of hellish beauty to me now. And often in the nights I lay awake trying to imagine how that face would look contorted with the last agony."

"Little by little a morbid belief fixed itself upon me. I came to think of him as of something more than man—an infernal and invulnerable being. I was continually haunted with a sense of impending doom. When I walked abroad in the night he seemed potential in the darkness all about me."

"Often, even in the glare of noon, I wheeled about suddenly expecting to see *his* pale face turned upon me. Oh, the strange, alluring beauty of that pale face! Every night I lay down with the

one thought: Another day has passed and it has not yet happened! And more and more as the days passed I felt the coming of the End."

"Three years passed—three years of that haunting, ever-increasing Dread. And then—one day in June—he came. But he was no longer the Louis Devlin I had met at Sidney. He was old—old! The ashes of some infernal fire were in his face. If a man should pass through hell and come back to earth, I think he would look as Louis looked then. His eyes were dimmed and sunken. His black curls had been cut and his whole appearance was sloven."

"A half-dozen loungers were in the bar-room, yet he was not recognized. But I—I could have felt him in the dark. 'You see I have come back,' he said. His voice startled me; it had grown strangely harsh. Only in the haughty lifting of his chin, as he spoke, could I see the old-time Louis struggling up out of the wreck. 'Yes,' I said, 'you have come.'"

"Strangely enough, it seemed quite a casual affair that he should be there before me; I had fancied his coming so often. But as I looked at his face, the devilish thought ran through my brain: What a horrible corpse he would make now!"

"We took a drink together and chatted about nothing in particular. Finally he asked me about business. Business had fallen off—another saloon had been started—I had lost about everything at gambling."

"'I knew it,' he said simply; 'that is why I came—I guess that was why I came back. I stayed away as long as I could.' His speech was utterly passionless, almost without inflection."

"He had been digging up the scenery in out-of-the-way places, as he put it. He had struck it rich; in fact, he thought he had struck millions. He talked about drifts and shafts and bedrock. He had already done considerable work. He had run a drift and sunk a shaft ten feet. Ten more feet should take him to bedrock, where he was certain of striking the fortune. The work required two; he needed a partner."

Would I care to go in with him, since business had fallen off?

"I leaped at the chance. Why? I had no further desire for gold. But something within me cried out with joy at the thought of being with him until it happened!

"I closed the saloon, and we went away into the hills together. We walked two days through the wilderness, yet never a word was spoken of the girl. When I trailed behind him I caught myself staring at a particular spot in the back of his head and wondering feverishly how a bullet wound would look just there. And often he turned about and smiled strangely, as though he had felt my thought.

"We came to the diggings. I found it as he had said. He had run a drift back into the bank of a creek some twenty feet, and at the end of the drift he had sunk a ten-foot shaft. We rigged up a rude windlass and a bucket. We went to work, each taking alternate days in the shaft. We reached a depth of twenty feet without striking bed-rock. The water began to be troublesome. We were forced to spend half the time dipping it out. At twenty-five feet the flow of water increased. Still we dipped and dug.

"And then one day—it happened!

"I was at the windlass; Devlin was in the shaft. I was hoisting a bucket of gravel, when the rope broke. 'Lucky it missed me,' said Louis.

"But something had happened within me. With the breaking of the rope it seemed that something snapped in my brain—something that had held me bound for so many days and nights. 'Let down the rope and I'll tie it again,' said Louis.

"I stood with my hand on the windlass crank. I think I must have stood

so without moving for an hour. During that time neither of us spoke.

"'The water is to my knees,' said Louis. I locked the windlass and sat down, watching the glow of Devlin's candle that shone dimly at the mouth of the shaft. 'It is on his hat,' I thought; 'the water will put it out.'

"At length a voice came up the shaft: 'Sam!'

"'What?' I said.

"'Were you ever at Sidney?'

"'I have been to Sand Creek,' I answered. It was some time before Devlin spoke again: 'It's up to my armpits!' A last lingering spark of pity lit up the darkness of my soul for a moment. I reached for the windlass crank. Something checked me. I was no longer doing the deed. It was as though Fate had thrust a powerful hand out of the dark.

"I heard splashing, and then the glow from the shaft disappeared. The splashing stopped, but a sound of deep breathing filled the cavernous place.

"Again the Shaft spoke: 'My fingers are giving out!'

"For some time there was only the heavy breathing and the steady drip, drop of the water—like blood. Then there came up from the dark hole a wheezing, ghostly voice: 'I didn't go to do it—God knows I didn't. But I'm not begging off. It was the devil of gambling that did it—I forgot. You know, Sam, you've felt it—and all the while the little girl was starving. I've been paying—God knows how I've been paying. I was always a sport—I always paid—*Oh!*'

"It ended in a gurgle, and there was some splashing for some time.

"I sat there in the dark until the faint dropping of the incoming water was the only sound."



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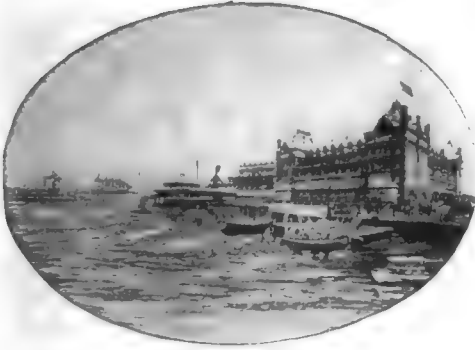
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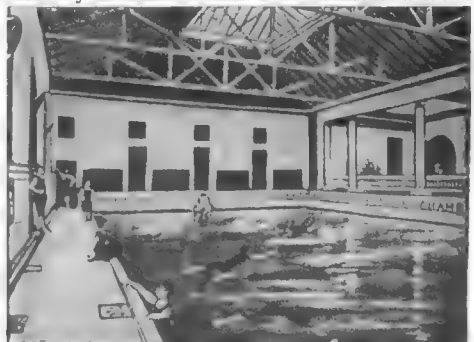
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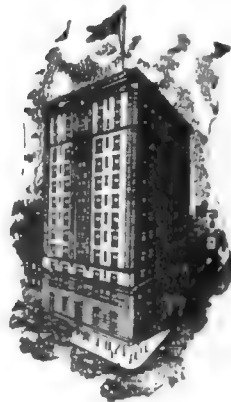
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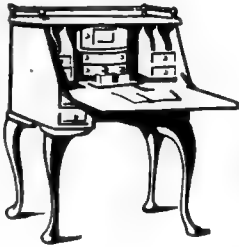
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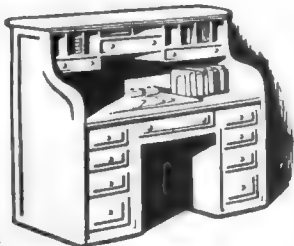
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To Illustrate What We Mean

The Case of English vs. American Humor: A Debate.

In the February issue a well-known Englishman vigorously presents his case. The answer—the American argument—will appear in the March number. This merry war of the humorists is worth any reader's while.

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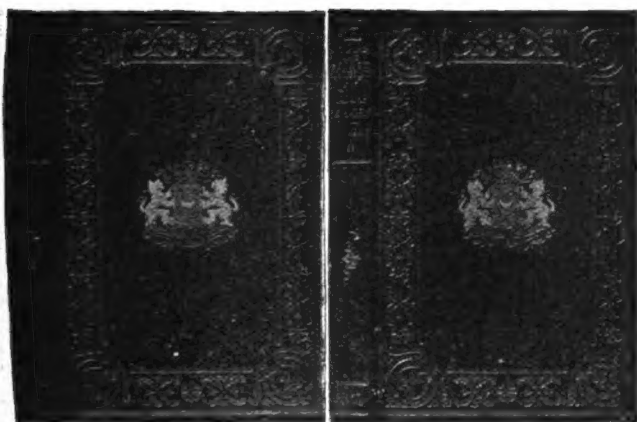
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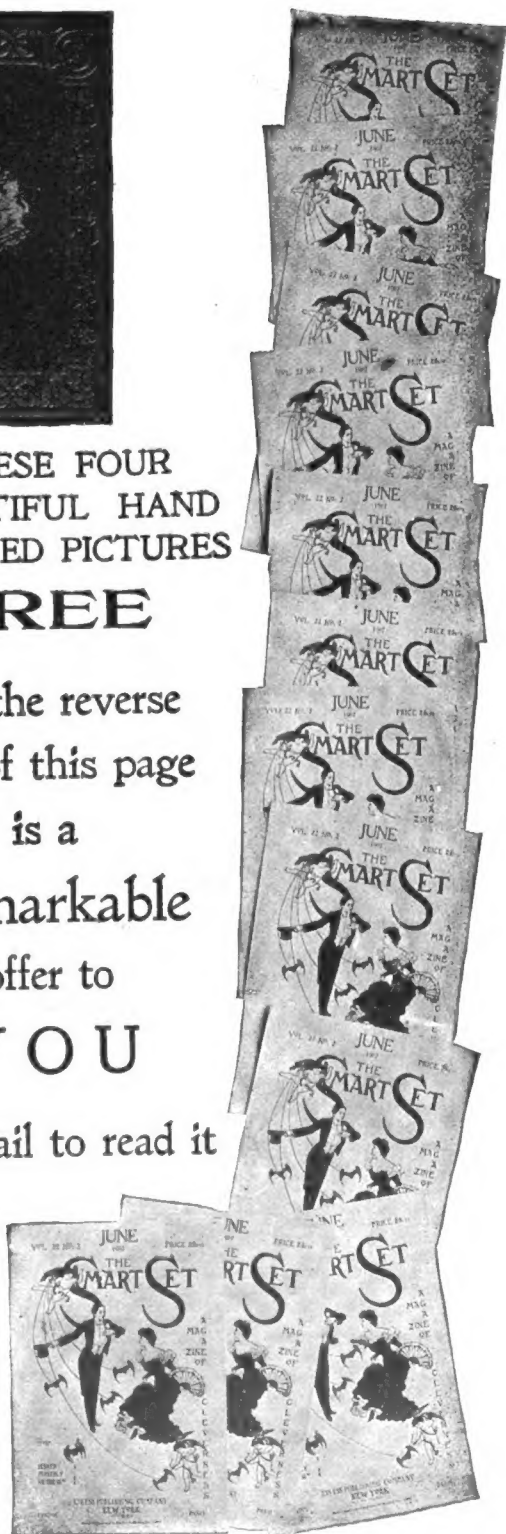
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The recital is vivacious to a degree, and is so frank and lucid, so droll and piquant, that one readily understands that a gloriously beautiful woman, who could pen such delightful reports of the gay court life of 1760-1774, must have had small difficulty in exercising complete sway over the heart and mind of the vain, weak and luxurious Louis XV.

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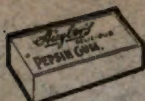
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